

# **THE NATURE OF MORAL PRINCIPLES**

**A Thesis Submitted  
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**By  
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**to the  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, KANPUR**

**APRIL, 1979**

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- H-Phil 772 Ethical Theories
- H-Soc. 726 Urban Sociology

Mr. Jagat Pal was admitted to the candidacy of the Ph.D. degree in 26th July 1976 after he successfully completed the written and oral qualifying examinations.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I take this opportunity to express my deep sense of gratitude to Dr. S.A. Shaida for his invaluable guidance and encouragement throughout the investigation. His contribution to the development of my analytical capabilities has been most valuable.

I wish to express my thanks to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who has read the first draft and made valuable suggestions. I also thank Dr. S.N. Mahajan, Dr.(Mrs.) Mohini Mullick, Dr. R.S. Misra and Dr. K.N. Sharma who have trained me well while I was doing my course work.

I am grateful to Mr. Parkash Mehta, Mr. P.R.Bhat and Miss Renu Khanna for their moral help and encouragement. I also thank Mr. P.R.Bhat for his kind help in preparing the final draft.

My affectionate thanks go to my wife, child and family members, without whose deep sense of understanding and patience the work would not have taken this shape.

I am very much thankful to the authorities of Indian Institute of Technology for providing me scholarship and other facilities. I will be failing in my duty if I do not thank Mr. V.N. Katiyar for typing the manuscript.

April 1979

Jagat Pal

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## SYNOPSIS

### THE NATURE OF MORAL PRINCIPLES

- A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Jagat Pal to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

Among classical philosophers Mill and Kant are those who have tried to formulate some features of moral principles. Modern philosophers like Hare, Toulmin, Nowel-Smith, Baier, Singer, Warnock and others have also tried to identify the characteristics of moral principles. But a critical reflection on these accounts makes one unhappy who is in search of an account which enables him to identify moral principles as distinct from other kinds of principles like social, legal, religious etc..

Main defect of classical and modern accounts of moral principle is that they stress some features of moral principle and ignore the others which makes the account inadequate.

A proper account of moral principles enables us to answer satisfactorily many questions relating to moral judgements, moral decisions, moral rules and their justifications. Nevertheless it also helps us to understand rules and functions of moral concepts like right, good, ought, duty etc.. For these reasons inquiry into the nature of moral principles is

a fundamental inquiry in ethics.

This inquiry, in which we adopt conceptual analysis as our method of analysis, concentrates mainly on the nature of moral principles. Attempt has been made to identify six different characteristics of moral principles. Any one characteristic will not suffice us to distinguish moral principles from social, legal, religious or other principles but we have maintained that all the significant characteristics taken together will definitely suffice any one to distinguish moral principles from other principles.

Before going into the nature of moral principle, we go into the discussion of what is the nature of principle in general as moral principle is species of principle.

There are some concepts which are closely associated with the concept of moral principle. An understanding of moral principles will not be possible unless we have an understanding of those concepts. We found concept of universality, prescriptivity, sanction, autonomy, content and over-ridingness are very much related with the concept of moral principle.

Moral principles are universalizable. They are person-neutral. Actions which they enjoin upon some one in a particular circumstance are at the same time applicable to

all similar persons in circumstances which are not significantly different. We observe that eventhough universalizability is an essential characteristic of moral principles, it will not suffice us to distinguish moral principles from other principles as social, legal, religious etc., for these principles also are universalizable in the same sense of the term 'universalizable'.

When a man accepts a moral principle, it binds him to act accordingly. But, however, under certain circumstances where there are justifiable reasons, he might not act accordingly. We find that a man cannot prescribe a moral principle to others unless he acts according to it or he gives justifiable reasons for not acting according to it. It cannot be the case that a moral principle is meant for others but not for the one who prescribes it.

Accepting a moral principle presupposes sanction of it. Moral principles are sanctioned by our own conscience. Conscience is nothing but the sense of right and wrong which we develop from environment, attitudes, preferences and reasons of our own. Moral principles are self imposed. But we observe that there are also other principles which our conscience sanction. Therefore we conclude that only sanction cannot be a criterion of moral principle.



Moral principles are independent of non-moral principles of a society. Justification or derivation of a moral principle must be from another basic moral principle. Acting on a moral principle necessarily presupposes autonomy of the individual who acts according to that moral principle.

Moral principles promote well-being, welfare, good and happiness of man kind. This is what we call content of a moral principle. The content can be in any one of these three forms: 1. self-regarding considerations, 2. other-regarding considerations or 3. universal considerations. Content of moral principles are determined and are imposed with good intentions.

A moral action is always according to a moral principle and the moral principle will always override any other conflicting non-moral principle. If two moral principles are conflicting each other, which one will override the other depends on the circumstance.

We conclude that there is no single characteristic of moral principle which can be treated as a criterion. The features of prescriptivity and sanction distinguish moral principles from natural principles. Internal sanction and autonomy distinguish moral principles from social, legal and

religious principles. Moral principles are more universal, general, pervasive and fundamental in comparison to moral laws and moral rules. They serve as grounds or sources of moral laws and moral rules.

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to examine the nature of moral principles which has drawn the attention of moral philosophers since the days of Aristotle. Among classical philosophers, Mill, Kant and others tried to formulate some features of moral principles which occupied the place of pride in most of their writings. Similarly in the modern period we find, Toulmin, Hare, Nowell-Smith, Baier, Singer, Warnock and number of others are seized of this problem. But further reflection on the problem makes this point clear that no philosopher has given a complete account of all the features which can enable us to identify moral principles as distinct from other kinds of principles like social, legal, religious etc..

The main defect from which most of these accounts suffer is that they take one or the other feature or features of morality as the only feature or features which are significant and they construe their models of analysis in a manner which is found inadequate for understanding and solving the problems of moral judgements, moral decisions, moral rules and some other related concepts like right, good, duty, ought and moral obligation. For example, Kant over emphasized universalizability and autonomy, but did not take into account the significance of the content of moral principles. We cannot

develop or formulate any sort of moral principle, in isolation from human desires, wants, purposes and the considerations about human good in general. Moral principles, of course, include them but do not depend upon them alone for their validity and justification. Hare, in his formulation of moral principle, considered only universalizability and prescriptivity and neglected other features like sanction, over-ridingness and content which are also implicitly or explicitly found in our moral principles. Nowell-Smith emphasized, besides universalizability and force of conscience, the presence of approval or pro-attitude towards moral principles, but did not consider the features of content, prescriptivity, and autonomy of moral principle. Baier regarded universalizability, openness (that is, teachability) and the good of everybody alike (the last comprises equity or fairness and general well-being) as the essential features of moral principles but he overlooked the sanction and the autonomous character of moral principles. Toulmin laid greater emphasis on the content of moral principles. Singer is silent on other features excepting generalizability and content. Similar is the case with most of other philosophers.

Thus it appears that the nature of moral principle is the one of the most fundamental problems of moral philosophy which needs further enquiry and clarification. Unless we are

clearer on this point we cannot satisfactorily answer a number of other questions relating to moral judgements, moral decisions, moral rules and their justifications. Moral principles underlie our conceptions of moral judgements, moral decisions and moral rules, and therefore it assumes fundamental significance in moral philosophy. A better understanding of the nature of moral principles would help us in correlating the roles and functions of other related concepts like right, good, ought, duty, obligation etc.. A better understanding of the nature of moral principles enables us to identify them as distinct from other kinds of principles, such as natural, logical, mathematical, social, legal and religious.

As mentioned above, there are a number of questions which are directly or indirectly connected with the nature of moral principles. Unless we solve the problems of the nature of moral principles, we cannot satisfactorily answer them. And a critical reflection on the problem shows that no philosopher has given a complete or a comprehensive account of all features of moral principles, which can enable us to identify moral principles as distinct from other kinds of principles, and solve various related problems. Therefore, there is a need for further enquiry and clarification into the nature of moral principles. This was the motivation behind choosing the problem. This study is an attempt to solve this problem and

provide as complete and comprehensive an account of all features of moral principles as possible, which can enable us to identify moral principles as distinct from other kinds of principles and solve various connected problems.

We have not discussed any question concerning the relation of moral principles to moral judgements, moral decisions, and many other important questions concerning the concept of right, wrong, good, bad, duty, ought and obligation, due to the limitations of time and scope. We have not made any effort to formulate any moral principle in the whole discussion to determine human conduct. But the features which we have derived from the analyses of moral principles may provide some basis on which moral principles can be formulated for determining our evaluation of human conduct. Therefore, the scope of the present study is limited to the basic question: What is the nature of moral principles? Or, what are those features in virtue of which a principle can be regarded as a moral principle?

We have avoided entering into historical controversies for our own convenience. We have adopted a particular mode of analysis and have tried to analyse the nature of moral principles. The method of our analysis is purely conceptual.

The model of our analysis tries to make it clear that moral principles by their own nature are universal and person-

neutral. If a particular action is enjoined upon someone in a particular circumstance, the same kind of actions are also enjoined upon all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances. Of course, they do not enjoin the same kind of actions upon all persons in all circumstances. In this respect their universalizability is conditional. They give direction to do some thing or to make certain changes in the state of affairs. Their function is to tell under what conditions what one ought to do and what one ought not to do from the moral point of view. In this respect they are action-guiding principles. They are self-approved and self-imposed principles. They, in some sense, guide and goad human beings to obey the principles. If people violate the principles, they themselves undergo various kinds of painful experiences. They are neither derivable from other kinds of principles (whatever they may be) nor they are wholly justifiable with reference to them. They are autonomous in nature. They always supersede or prevail over other conflicting non-moral principles within the frame work of morality. They promote human well-being, welfare, happiness, satisfaction, good, profit, interest etc..

These various features are also the features of moral laws and moral rules. But they differ in their scope and extent of application. Moral principles (i.e. 'Everyone

ought to promote everyone's interest') are more universal, pervasive, fundamental and abstract than moral laws ( i.e. 'Keep your promises' or 'Always speak the truth') and moral rules (i.e. 'Children ought to obey their parents') and serve as their sources or grounds. Thus moral laws and moral rules depend upon moral principles for their validity and justification. But moral principles are not grounded upon anything beyond themselves. There is nothing higher than some principle itself which can serve as their ground or source or with reference to which they can be justified. In this respect they go beyond justification. If we try to justify them, two cases may happen: either we may commit some fallacy or we may justify them with reference to their constituents or features which would be nothing but begging the question. Moral laws are more specific, though universal but with narrower range of application and lesser in generality than moral principles which are universal with wider range of application, pervasive, fundamental and more general than both moral laws and moral rules. Moral rules are more specific, less general and with still narrower range of application with regard to universality than moral laws. On this line of distinction, moral laws are higher than moral rules and moral principles are higher than moral laws but there is no hard and fast distinction. Nevertheless, moral principles, moral laws, and moral rules



all of them have importance, and are found involved in determining morality of human conduct. The distinction which has been drawn is analogous to the one that can be drawn in the context of law. Legal principles (e.g. fundamental and directive principles) are more universal, vague, pervasive, fundamental and more general than laws of the state ( i.e. civil laws, criminal laws) and legal rules ( i.e. traffic rules) and serve as their sources or grounds. Thus we have used the terms 'moral principle', 'moral laws' and 'moral rules' in different ways in the present study and the enquiry which we have made is confined to the nature of moral principles rather than moral laws or moral rules. But it need not be gainsaid that all of them are required for understanding the concept of right and wrong.

In order to see how do the above mentioned features follow from the understanding and analysis of the nature of moral principles, the present study has been divided into seven chapters. In the second and the third chapters we have discussed universalizability and prescriptivity. In the fourth, fifth, sixth and the seventh chapters we have discussed the features of sanction, autonomy, content and over-ridingness respectively. In the final chapter the conclusions drawn from preceding discussions have been put together.

## CHAPTER I

### The Nature of Principle in General

What is the nature of moral principle? This problem is directly or indirectly connected with the problem of the nature of principle. Unless we understand the nature of principle in general we cannot satisfactorily tackle the problem concerning the nature of moral principle. The obvious reason being that moral principle is one of the species of principle. The relation between them is the one that holds between genus and species. The concept of principle is invariably involved in the concept moral principle. And the nature of the relation being what it is, the first and the foremost thing which is required is to understand the nature of principle.

But how can we try to understand the nature of principle? Can we talk intelligibly about the nature of principle apart from its application in various contexts and situations? Definitely not. The reason being that there is nothing like the meaning of principle. There is no one particular meaning of principle with reference to which we can intelligibly talk about principles in all sorts of situations or occasions of their employment. There are various uses of the term 'principle'. In natural science this term is used in the sense of description. The principle of science is not a prescription as to how something ought to behave ( the term

'prescription' here includes command, permission and prohibition ). It is neither determined and imposed by human beings nor it is a command to the effect that natural phenomena shall behave in a particular fashion. It is no account of human custom and convention but rather is a statement concerning the behaviour of facts. It is a description of how something does in fact behave. The principle of causality (or law of causality) that every event must have cause, for example, does not prescribe to the events how they have to behave; this principle does not in any way "compel" the events, but expresses that every event is preceded by some cause. In this sense natural principle is of the nature of 'Is'. And being only description of what happens there can be with regard to them no talk of "compulsion" or "obligation" as it is talked of in the context of political or legal principles. Natural principles are entirely impersonal and above all human choices. They are not man-made. They are discovered by human beings in the course of time. They are neither violable nor changeable. So far as the science and observation go, a genuine natural principle - that is, one based on sound experiments and correctly defined - is incapable of being violated. If it holds in one case, it also holds in all cases wherever it is applicable independent of various circumstances and situations. There is no exception to it. If there are exceptions, it ceases to be a principle. Of course, our knowledge of a

particular principle may be imperfect, and with the advance knowledge, it may be found that what at one time was believed to be a natural principle is not really so. But this merely means that our knowledge is liable to change not the principle itself - if it is a correct description of facts.

But in the case of politics and law, the term 'principle' is used in quite a different way. The political or legal principles are not descriptions of how something does in fact behave. They are basis for prescriptions as to how human beings ought to behave. Such principles provide reason or justification to prescribe, with regard to a group of people, certain modes of behaviour. They are imposed and enforced upon people by threats of punishment for their uniform behaviour in conformity to them. They imply duties on the part of the people to obey them. If they choose to disobey the principle, they are punished by the competent authority, i.e. the authorised agency of the government. Political or legal principles are man-made. They are changeable and violable. They are of the nature of "ought". Although this is correct that the principles of politics or law are not universal 'in practice' i.e., they are broken many times by the members of the society, but this does not mean that they are not universal and person-neutral in nature. Political or legal principles are also universal and impersonal in theory, if not

in practice, for it is intended to apply to all cases alike and to all persons alike. If they hold in one case, they also hold in all cases of the same kind. Everyone is treated by the same principle unless there are relevant differences in their cases. Their primary and direct aim is either the protection of life and property or the regulation of social co-operation and harmony. This statement remains true in all cases whatever view one holds of life and property- whether the 'Capitalistic' or the 'Communitistic' view. It is recognized that political or legal principles rest on moral foundations and are guided by moral principle (however imperfectly apprehended). Thus the sense in which the term 'principle' is used in the case of natural sciences is not the same in which it is used in the case of politics or law. It carries different senses in its application in different contexts.

In morality the term 'principle' is also used in the sense of prescription, but it is used in a way quite different from political or legal principles. Moral principles are prescriptions as to how human beings ought to govern their behaviours in certain kind of circumstances. Like political or legal principles, moral principles are also of the nature "ought" and can be violated by people. But unlike them, moral principles are determined, authorised and imposed by the individual upon himself, independent of external enforcement

of any sort. When human beings disobey moral principles or act contrary to them they themselves undergo various painful experiences. But in violating them, people are not punished as it is seen in the case of political or legal principles. The sanction attached to them is internal rather than external. Moral principles are universal and person-neutral for the action which they enjoin upon one person in a particular kind of circumstances, is of the same kind of actions which are also enjoined at the same time upon other persons of the society or the community, unless there are relevant differences in their cases. If they hold in one case they also hold in all cases of the same kind. They are not independent of human choices and preferences as it is seen in the case of natural principles. Thus the sense in which the term 'principle' is used in the case of science or politics is not the same in which it is used in case of morality.

In religion the term 'principle' is used in both descriptive and prescriptive senses. Some religious principles are descriptions of how something does in fact behave. The principle that the fruit of karma is never destroyed, for example, does not prescribe to the karmas how they have to behave; but rather describes the fact that the fruit of karma is never destroyed. Everyone reaps the fruit of his karmas. The principle of karma describes the nature of karma.

The question of prescription does not directly come into effect though certain prescriptions or imperatives are in fact justified and recommended on the basis of practical considerations in the light of the nature of karma and its operations. But there are certain kinds of religious principles which are used in the sense of prescription as to how human beings ought to govern their conduct. The principle 'Always speak truth', for example, does not describe how in fact truth behaves but rather prescribes to human beings how they should behave in certain sorts of circumstances. Nevertheless whatever the use of religious principles may be, it is believed to rest on the will of a super-human power or powers. On the belief in such powers, many diverse systems of religious principles have been formulated, prescribing form of worship and form of social organization (churches, priests, castes etc.). In religion it is also believed that moral principles are derived from religious principle and are justified with reference to the latter. But this is a mistaken assumption. Religious principles are sanctioned by the religious authority independent of the agents' choices and preferences. While moral principles are sanctioned by the agent himself independent of external enforcement. In this respect religious principles differ from moral principles. But like religious principles, moral principles are also

universal and violable. If they hold in one case, they also hold in all cases of the same kind. They are broken many times by the people. Still they remain universal and impersonal in nature. God alone is thought to be the supreme and universal legislator. It is said that human beings who infringe religious principles undergo various sufferings and miseries not only in this life but also in the life hereafter.

The sense of 'principle', which is found in the case of natural science, politics, morality and religion, is not the same that is prevalent in the case of logic and mathematics. The meaning of 'principle' is quite different in such cases. Consider, for example, the principle (or law) of contradiction: "Nothing can be and not be at one and the same time" and the principle (or law) of Excluded Middle: "Everything is either B or not-B". Are such principles 'descriptive' or 'prescriptive'? It is the opinion of some philosophers that these principles are descriptions of how people in fact think. But this is not very satisfactory. For, first of all, it is unclear in itself what it means to think according to principle that nothing can be and not be at one and the same time or the principle that everything is either B or not-B. Secondly, the idea that these principles of logic describe how people think seems untenable because as a matter of fact, people sometimes do not think in accordance



with them; people do, for example, contradict themselves, thus violating the principle of contradiction. Shall we then say that the principles of logic prescribe how we ought to think and how we may but must not think? Some philosophers do hold such a view, but it also appears obvious on reflection that the sense in which the principles of logic 'prescribe' (permit, prohibit) is quite different from the sense in which legal and moral principles prescribe. Moreover, here the idea only suggests itself that the principles of logic prescribe how one ought to think and calculate in order to think and calculate correctly. But the principles of logic do not aim at making people think correctly, as the principles of politics or morals can be said to aim at making people behave in a certain way. Thus it seems that the principles of logic do not prescribe human conduct in the same sense in which the principles of politics and morals do. It may be said for the sake of argument that the 'prescriptive' function of the principles of logic is secondary to the 'descriptive' function of them as stating modes of correct thinking. Primarily the principles of logic state truth about the logical entities, propositions, relations and inferences. What, on this view, the principles of logic describe is not how human beings in fact think but rather how logical entities are formulated. Even in this sense there is a difficulty about

the status of logical entities. It would be perhaps a more correct characterization to say that the principles of logic neither describe nor prescribe anything, but rather determine which inferences and arguments are correct and legitimate in thinking. What is true in case of logic, is also true in case of mathematics. Whatever the use of logical or mathematical principles may be, it is always true that if they hold in one case, they also hold in all cases of the same kind.

Thus it appears that there are four different senses of the term 'principle' : (1) some principles are only descriptive, (2) some principles are essentially prescriptive, (3) some principles are both descriptive and prescriptive, and (4) some principles are neither descriptive nor prescriptive but rather determinative. Natural principles come in the category (1). Political, legal and moral principles come in the category (2). Religious principles come in the category (3). Logical and mathematical principles come in the category (4). Other remaining principles will come under either of the above stated categories. There being various senses of the term 'principle', it makes no sense to say that there is the specific sense or meaning involved in all sorts of principles, and which justify their employment in all possible contexts. These four categories of principles are independent of each other. And being

independent, they are neither derivable from each other nor justifiable with reference to each other.

But whatever the sense of 'principle' may be, in spite of fundamental differences there is a common feature invariably present in all uses of principle. This feature is 'universalizability'. The term 'universalizability' stands for: what holds in one case also holds in all cases of the same kind. The reason being that what constitutes a basis to say that something is a principle in one case also at the same time constitutes the basis to hold that the same thing is a principle in all other cases of the same kind. Thus, there are, again, two different senses of principle: general and specific. In general sense the meaning of principle is found constant in all its uses while its reason for application differs from one set of cases to another set of cases. This is so because universalizability feature is a common feature in all uses of principle. We cannot say that universalizability feature constitutes the meaning of principles. It cannot be said because it is not a sufficient condition of principle. It is only a partial feature of principle. And being a partial feature it constitutes only a partial meaning of principle. In specific sense the meaning of principle does not remain constant because the reason or reasons for its application differs from one set of cases to another set of cases.

To be fundamental is another essential nature of a principle of whatever sort it may be. If we ask, 'How fundamental?' the answer, logically, would be: the principle is that which comes first in the order of explanation, whether we are explaining the nature of demonstration or the nature of a concrete fact. If the principle of the universe is spiritual, it is the existence of spirit that explains all other facts. If the principle of universe is moral order it is the truth of morality that explains (in a strange sense of the term 'explain') all other particular facts and phenomena of the universe. Regard for principle in politics and law is somewhat analogous to what it is in the case of morality. Moreover, whatever be the form of principle, in any case it is the fundamental postulate of all proofs and reasoning. They are presuppositions of all arguments. They are beyond demonstration or proof. Their justification lies in themselves. They are the statements of a universal truth i.e. a truth which holds good universally, as distinguished from a particular truth which holds good in some cases only. Though principles cannot themselves be the subject matter of proof, yet they form the very foundation of all proofs. They cannot be derived either from deduction alone or from induction alone. The principle of nature, for example, cannot be derived only from mathematical principles nor are wholly justifiable with reference to these.

Difference between principle and law or rule is only of degree. We can differentiate them only in accordance with their degree of universality or generality. Principles are more universal, pervasive, abstract, comprehensive and fundamental than laws and rules and serve as their sources or grounds. Principles are not themselves the subject-matter of proof and justification because there is no higher ground or source of justification. They are the highest universal truth. All kinds of justifications presuppose them. But laws and rules come under the perview of proof and justification. They are derived from some principles and are justified in accordance with them. Principles provide ground for their justification or explanations. In comparison to laws and rules, principles are more universal, pervasive, abstract and fundamental. In other respects principles, law and rule do not differ from one another. In some cases both the terms 'principle' and 'law' are used synonymously. The notion of causality or uniformity of nature, for example, is often referred to both as a principle and as a law. The same is true in case of the fundamentals of thought (commonly referred to as laws of thought) i.e. the notion of Contradiction or Excluded Middle is also often referred to as a principle or a law. But this distinction is very much clear in case of politics and jurisprudence. Legal principles (e.g. the principle of property) are higher, more universal,

pervasive and fundamental than criminal laws or laws of inheritance and such laws are more universal, comprehensive, abstract and fundamental than legal rules (e.g. traffic rules). Hence the difference between principle and law (or rules) is only of degree, not of kind. Laws are higher than rules and principles are higher than laws. They stand in heirarchy.

## CHAPTER II

### Universalizability

We have seen in the first chapter that universalizability is an essential characteristic of 'principle'. If universalizability is an essential characteristic of principles in general, it must also hold good of moral principles being one of the species of principle. If it holds of moral principles, in what way is it true of them? Let us examine this question in detail.

Supposing X (X is a person) sincerely asserts that P is a moral principle for him (to perform action A in the circumstance C). What follows from his assertion that 'P is a moral principle for him'? One thing which appears to follow from his assertion is that P has some moral principle-making characteristic (this moral principle-making characteristic may be either in the form of self interest or other interest or general interest) on the ground of which X says that P is a moral principle for him. This follows from very use of 'moral principle' itself. Because, unless there is some moral principle-making characteristics in P, how can he say P is a moral principle for him? The use of P as a moral principle, always presupposes that P has certain characteristics which are responsible for making it a moral principle. If X asserts

that P does not have such characteristics in it, then thereby it would imply that he does not sincerely accept that P is a moral principle for him. Denial of the latter, that is, the assertion that P does not have moral principle-making characteristic in it, negates the acceptance of P as a moral principle. This follows from the use of 'moral principle'. How can P be a moral principle, unless P has some moral principle-making characteristics in it? If X makes a contrary claim, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'. To deny those characteristics, which are invariably found in the use of moral principle, is to make the use of P as a genuine moral principle impossible. The intelligibility of principle lies in its consistent application. It implies that there is an implicative relation between moral principle and its moral principle-making characteristics. The latter is always found implicitly or explicitly present in the former on the ground of which the term 'moral principle' is applied. The characteristics in question constitute a reason for believing that a given principle is a moral principle. Hence X's meaningful use of P as a moral principle necessarily commits him to accept that P involves some moral principle-making characteristics in it which prepares ground (or constitutes a reason) for him to say that P is a moral principle for him.



The term 'reason' is an ambiguous term. Sometime this term is used in the sense of mental power concerned with forming conclusions, judgements or inference. Sometime this term is used in the sense of power of intelligence and dispassionate thought. But here we are using this term in the sense of certain kinds of characteristics with respect to which something is said to be of a particular kind. The phrase 'moral principle-making characteristics' stands for a certain kind of characteristic in virtue of which a principle is said to be a moral principle.

Now if the concept of moral principle necessarily involves the concept of reason in it on the basis of which it is used intelligibly, it begs the question; what is the nature of reason? Unless we answer the question, the analysis of moral principle remains unclear. Hence let us examine the nature of 'reason'.

Supposing X sincerely accepts that R is a reason for P for saying that P is a moral principle for him. What does this imply? Does this imply that R constitutes a reason only for X for saying that P is a moral principle for him? Definitely not. If R is a reason in one case, it must hold in all cases of the same kind, or wherever it is applicable. This follows from the very use of 'reason' itself. Otherwise the application of 'reason' becomes impossible. How can

something be said to be a reason in one case but not in other cases, unless there are relevant differences? If there is a relevant difference, it will constitute another reason to say that R is not applicable in that context. But this does not make the point meaningless. It is true in all cases that what holds of a reason in one case also holds of a reason in all cases wherever it is applicable at the same time. The intelligibility of 'reason' lies in its consistent application in practice. This is true in the light of what we mean by the term 'reason' itself. If the consistent application of 'reason' is denied no discussion can be made possible. Because all discussions, proof, disproof etc. presuppose their consistent applications. If X says that R is not a reason for all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances then thereby it would imply that he does not accept R to be a reason for him for saying that P is a moral principle. How can X say that R is a reason in his case but not in other cases unless there is a relevant difference. Denial of the latter, that is, the assertion that R does not hold of all cases of the same kind negates the acceptance of R as a reason for him. This follows from the very meaning of 'reason'. If X makes a contrary claim, that is, if he says that R is a reason for him but R is not a reason for all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances,

then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'reason'. Non-acceptance of the applicability of R in other relevant cases makes the use of R on the same ground impossible. It implies that the use of 'reason' goes beyond the particularities of the individual cases. It is universal and person-neutral in its nature. In other words, there is an implicative relation between reason and its universalizability. Hence X's meaningful use of R as a reason in his case necessarily binds him to accept that R is universal and person-neutral.

If it is the nature of reason that it is universal and person-neutral then any principle involving reason in it must be universal and person-neutral. This is a tautology. If they hold good in one case, they at the same time also hold of all cases of the same kind. If X says that he sincerely accepts that P is a moral principle for him (to do action A in the circumstance C) on the ground of reason R, he is thereby committed to accept that P is a moral principle for all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances. This is true in the light of the nature of moral principle itself. If X denies the consequent, that is, if he says that P is not a moral principle (because of R) for all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances, then thereby it would imply that he does not

sincerely accept P as a genuine moral principle for him at all. Negation of the consequent negates the acceptance of the antecedent. What constitutes a reason for someone to say that a particular kind of principle is a moral principle in one's case, at the same time constitutes a reason for one to accept that the same principle holds of all cases of the same kind; that is, the same principle is also a moral principle for other persons of the society or the community unless there are relevant differences in their cases. If X makes a contrary claim, that is, if he says that P is a moral principle for him (because of R) but P is not a moral principle (because of R) for other relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the terms 'reason' and 'moral principle'. Non-applicability of P in all relevantly similar cases, makes the use of P as a moral principle impossible. It is possible that P is said to be a moral principle in one's case but not in other cases of the same kind only when there are relevant differences.

The foregoing analysis, thus, makes the point clear that it is the nature of moral principles (whatever they may be) that the actions which they enjoin upon someone in a particular kind of circumstance, are those which are at the same time enjoin upon all relevantly similar persons in

relevantly similar circumstances. In other words, whatever moral principles may be about - it is their nature, that if they hold in one case, they also hold for all cases of the same kind. What constitutes a reason for someone to say that a particular kind of principle is a moral principle for him, also at the same time constitutes a reason for him to accept that the same principle is a moral principle for other persons of the society or the community, unless there are relevant differences in their cases. Moral principle cannot have exceptions without ceasing to be principle. It should, however, be noted that all moral principles do not possess the same degree of generality. Some moral principles (i.e. 'Everyone ought to promote everyone's interest') are more general than other moral principles (i.e. 'Everyone ought to promote others interest'). But whatever the case may be, if a moral principle holds in one case, it also at the same time holds in all cases where it is applicable. The difference in their degrees of generality does not negate the universalizability of moral principles. In all cases a moral principle still remains universal and person-neutral. Following points need special emphasis:

First, there are two senses of moral principles; general and specific. In the general sense the use of moral principle preserves a constant meaning in its all sets of

uses, because universalizability and some other features like prescriptivity are invariably found in all its uses. In its specific sense, the meaning of moral principle does not preserve constant meaning in all sets of cases, because, reason for its application differs from one set of cases to another set of cases. For example, moral principle 'One ought to keep one's promises' preserves a constant meaning in general sense in its all sets of uses, while in specific sense its meaning differs from one set of cases to another set of cases (although within one set of cases it preserves constant meaning). Reason for its application differs from person to person. X says, 'One ought to keep one's promises' is a genuine moral principle, 'because promise keeping promotes social interests'.  $X_1$  says, 'One ought to keep one's promises' is a genuine moral principle', because promise keeping promotes one's interest.  $X_2$  says, 'One ought to keep one's promises' is a genuine moral principle, 'because promise keeping is good in itself'.  $X_3$  says, 'One ought to keep one's promises' is a genuine moral principle 'because promises are obligatory'. People commit mistake by confusing reason for the application of moral principle in a particular case with its meaning; and then they try to universalise it, identifying the particular reasons with those which are true for all occasions.

Secondly, there is a difference between saying that reasons are universalizable, and saying that reasons are universally accepted. The former statement does not logically imply that reasons are subscribed to by everybody in the world; they may or may not be subscribed to while the latter statement logically implies that reasons are subscribed to by everybody in the world. Hence, when we assert that reasons are universalizable, we do not assert it in this sense that they are subscribed to by everybody in the world, but instead, we assert that they are applicable to all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances.

Thirdly, just as there is a difference between saying that reasons are universalizable and saying that reasons are universally accepted, similarly, there is a difference between saying that moral principles are universalizable, and saying that moral principles are universally accepted. The former statement does not logically imply that moral principles are subscribed to by everybody in the world; they may or may not be so subscribed, while the latter statement necessarily implies that moral principles are subscribed to by everybody in the world. Hence, when we say that moral principles are necessarily universalizable, we do not assert that they are actually subscribed to by everybody in the world, but instead, we assert that they are applicable to all relevantly similar

persons in relevantly similar circumstances.

Fourthly, there is a difference between saying that moral principles are universalizable, and saying that moral principles are generalizable. The former statement necessarily asserts that moral principles are applicable to all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances, while the latter statement does not necessarily assert that moral principles are applicable to all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances. It only asserts that moral principles are applicable to most of the people in most of the circumstances (the term 'general' here refers to number or degree). Some philosophers like M.G. Singer<sup>\*</sup> have used the term 'generalizable' in the sense of 'universalizable'. Nevertheless, our point is only to show that when we assert that moral principles are universalizable, we do not assert in this sense that they are applicable to most of the people in most of the circumstances, but instead, we assert that they are applicable to all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances.

Fifthly, the universalizability of moral principle, is not derived inductively but is derived from the analysis of

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\* M.G. Singer, Generalization in Ethics, (Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1963), pp. 19-20.



the role, function, and the criteria of acceptability and applicability of moral principles in concrete situations. In other words, it is the comprehensive analysis of all the aspects related to the nature of moral principle which unmistakably points towards the universalizability of moral principles (as it is done in the case of value judgements).

It must, however, be noted that moral principles are not universalizable regardless of human nature and men's abilities, characteristics and circumstances etc. Their universalizability depends upon the agent's nature, ability, characteristics and circumstances. This feature of moral principles follows from its meaning. Moral principles are principles of actions or conduct and it is the nature of act that it depends upon the agent's nature, abilities characteristics, circumstances etc.. There should be no difficulty in accepting this, provided we accept what has been said above regarding the nature of moral principle. It implies that a given moral principle which enjoins the performance of a particular kind of action in a particular kind of circumstance, does not necessarily enjoin at the same time the performance of the same kind of actions upon all persons regardless of their nature, abilities, characteristics, and circumstances. Consider, for example, the case of moral principle 'One ought to save someone's life from drowning into

the river'. This moral principle is not applicable to all persons regardless of their nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances. It is applicable, for example, to those persons who have eyes and legs or to those who know swimming. But it is not applicable to those persons who are blind or lame or to those who do not know swimming. Because such differences are relevant differences which make the applicability of the moral principle 'One ought to save someone's life from drowning into the river' in such cases impossible. It implies that the moral principle 'One ought to save someone's life from drowning into the river' does not enjoin the performance of saving someone's life from drowning into the river upon all persons regardless of their nature, abilities, circumstances and characteristics. To hold a contrary view would imply lack of understanding of the nature of moral principle itself.

A question may arise here: How can one tell in particular cases which differences are morally relevant and which are morally irrelevant? Or what is the criterion to say that a particular kind of difference is morally relevant and a particular kind of difference is not morally relevant? Of course, there is no criterion to decide which differences are morally relevant and which are morally irrelevant outside the context. What is morally relevant in a particular case may or may not be relevant in other cases. Similarly what is

morally irrelevant in a particular case may or may not be morally irrelevant in other cases. This happens because contexts vary. For example, the colour of two persons is not a relevant difference in relation to their weight but it is a relevant difference in relation to their capacity to absorb light; or the height of two persons is not a relevant difference in relation to their capacity to absorb light but it is relevant difference in the context of their selection for defence services. Similarly in moral context, swimming is a morally relevant difference between two persons in relation to their saving someone's life from drowning into the river, but it is a morally irrelevant difference between two persons in relation to their paying someone's debt or telling truth to someone. It implies that there is no criterion to determine which differences are morally relevant and which differences are morally irrelevant outside the context. Within a given context there is no difficulty in determining or telling which differences are morally relevant and which differences are morally irrelevant. We can tell this only when the facts are viewed in the light of moral principle. In the given example of a moral principle 'One ought to save someone's life from drowning into the river', swimming is a morally relevant factor because it makes a significant difference in the applicability of moral principle. It can alter the applicability

of moral principle in the sense that without the ability to swim, saving someone's life from drowning into the river is not possible at all, whereas the colour of a person is not a morally relevant difference because it does not make any difference in the applicability of moral principle. Hence, we can tell in a particular case which differences are morally relevant and which differences are morally irrelevant noting the facts in the light of moral principle. If some factor significantly affects the applicability of moral principle then it is a morally relevant difference and if it does not bring any change then it is a morally irrelevant difference in that context.

The features which affect the universalizability of moral principles do not affect the universalizability of mathematical and logical principles. Unlike moral principles, mathematical and logical principles are validly applicable to all persons in all circumstances regardless of human nature and men's abilities, characteristics, circumstances etc. This is so simply on the ground that they are not principles of actions or conduct. And not being principle of action or conduct their universalizability does not logically depend upon human nature and men's abilities, characteristics, circumstances etc. Such differences are irrelevant from their point of view. This feature of mathematical and logical

principle analytically follows from their nature and meaning. But such a thing we do not find in case of moral principles as has been explained above. Their universalizability depends upon human nature and men's abilities, characteristics, circumstances etc..

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that moral principles are validly universalizable in the following form:

(1) If a moral principle enjoins the performance of a particular kind of action upon a person in a particular kind of circumstance, it must also, at the same time, enjoin the same kind of actions upon all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances. For example, if moral principle P enjoins the performance of action A upon the person X in the circumstance C, then P also enjoins the performance of actions of kind A at the same time upon all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances.

Moral principles are not validly universalizable in the following form:

(2) When a moral principle enjoins the performance of a particular kind of action upon a person in a particular kind of circumstance, it also enjoins upon him the same kind of actions in all circumstances (not only in all relevantly similar circumstances). For example, if a moral principle P

enjoins the performance of action A upon the person X in the circumstance C, then P also enjoins the performance of actions of kind A at the same time upon him in all circumstances.

(3) If a moral principle enjoins the performance of a particular kind of action upon a person in a particular kind of circumstance, the same kind of actions it also at the same time enjoins upon all persons (not only those who are relevantly similar to him) in all circumstances. For example, if moral principle P enjoins the performance of action A upon the person X in the circumstance C, P also enjoins the performance of actions of kind A at the same time upon all persons (besides, of course, the persons relevantly similar to X) in all circumstances (in addition to the circumstances relevantly similar to C).

The (2) and the (3) forms of universalizability are invalid forms of universalizability for the reason that they violate certain conditions of the applicability of moral principles. Form (2) violates the condition of the circumstance and form (3) violates both the conditions of the moral principles that is, the consideration of the agent's nature, abilities characteristics and/ or circumstances. Therefore, in both the forms of universalizability someone's acceptance of the antecedent does not logically commit him to accept the consequent also. He can accept one and reject the

other without committing any fallacy. For example, X can quite consistently say in the same breath that moral principle P enjoins upon him the performance of action A in the circumstance C but moral principle P does not enjoin upon him the performance of action A in the circumstances  $C_1, C_2, C_3 \dots \dots \dots C_n$  (if these circumstances are not of the kind C) or moral principle P does not enjoin the performance of action A upon the persons  $X_1, X_2, X_3 \dots \dots \dots X_n$  (when the persons are not relevantly similar to X) in all circumstances  $C_1, C_2, C_3 \dots \dots \dots C_n$  (if these are not relevantly similar to the circumstances of kind C) without committing fallacy of any sort by giving some morally justifiable reason/s. It would be a blunder if it is claimed that in such cases X misuses the term 'moral principle'. X does not misuse the term 'moral principle' because he offers morally justifiable reason/s. He would have committed a mistake if he had not offered morally justifiable reason/s. When he offers morally justifiable reason/s he applies moral principle P consistently in practice.

On some interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy, he is said to have mistakenly claimed that moral principles are applicable unconditionally to all persons in all circumstances like Natural Laws although it is admitted that he was correct in saying that no agent is entitled to make an arbitrary exception to moral principles in favour of himself or in favour

of his friends and relatives. Whether this interpretation of Kant is correct or not, we are never entitled to say that moral principles are applicable in the same manner to all persons in all circumstances regardless of human nature and men's abilities, characteristics and circumstances. They are flexible in certain contexts where morally relevant differences are found but not arbitrarily as we have explained in the case of moral principle 'One ought to save someone's life from drowning into the river'. The failure to understand properly this characteristic of moral principles becomes the basis of applying it beyond its legitimate range of application.

Moral principles are also validly universalizable in the following form but this is a limited form of the universalizability of moral principles.

(4) When a moral principle enjoins the performance of a particular kind of action upon a person in a particular kind of circumstance, it also enjoins upon him the same kind of actions in relevantly similar circumstances. For example, if moral principle P enjoins the performance of action A upon the person X in the circumstance C, P also enjoins upon him the performance of action of kind A in relevantly similar circumstances of kind C.

This form of universalizability of moral principles is a valid form of universalizability, because it does not violate



the conditions of moral principles. But this is a limited form of universalizability of moral principles because it limits the range of morality to an individual himself while as a matter of fact, morality goes beyond particular individuals. This is important to note that when we say that morality goes beyond a particular individual we do not say that morality does not include an individual. We only mean that morality includes all individuals of the society, not an individual alone. The notion of moral principle presupposes its consistent application to all individuals of the society or the community not only to a particular individual alone.

Further, the form (4) would be a valid form only if it does not contradict the form (1). Because denial of the form (1) which is a presupposition of the form (4) makes the use of moral principle in the case of (4) unwarranted in the light of the meaning of moral principles as has already been explained earlier. Therefore, when we say that moral principles are universalizable we include both forms of universalizability in our conception of the universalizability of moral principles.

Now one may ask: If the universalizability of moral principles depends upon agent's nature, abilities, characteristics, circumstances etc. for its legitimate application, then the whole thesis of the universalizability of moral principles becomes non-applicable and meaningless.

Indeed, two persons' natures, abilities, characteristics and circumstances cannot be identical. X's nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances are not identical with Y's nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances and vice versa. If this is so then any two persons' moral principle cannot be the same. X's moral principle cannot be the moral principle for Y and Y's moral principle cannot be the moral principle for X. In this way the whole thesis of the universalizability of moral principles becomes inapplicable and meaningless.

This is, of course, true that two persons are not identical in their nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances but thereby it does not follow that the thesis of the universalizability of moral principles is inapplicable and meaningless. To say that two persons are not identical in their nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances is not to say that two persons cannot be similar in their nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances too. X's nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances may or may not be similar to Y's nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances. For example, X's hair, nose, hands and legs are not identical with Y's hair, nose, hands and legs and vice versa. But this does not debar us from saying that X and Y are nevertheless similar. We may quite consistently and

intelligibly say that X and Y are similar to each other in this respect that both have hair, nose, hands and legs of equal size though they are not similar to each other in another respect because their hair, nose, hands and legs are of different colours. The same case applies to human nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances. Human beings can assimilate together in some respects and differ in some other respects in their nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances... For example, X's desire to get money to cure his father is not identical with Y's desire to get money to cure his father (both X and Y belong to two different families). But even then X and Y are assimilable to each other in this respect that their circumstances and purposes are of similar kind, that is, desire for money to cure one's father although they differ from each other in other respects. It implies that human beings can be similar in their nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances without their being identical or even similar in all respects. If human beings can be similar in their nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances then one person's moral principle can become the moral principle for other persons of society or the community. X's moral principle can be the moral principle for Y and Y's moral principle can be the moral principle for X. Since, as a matter of fact, human beings often mutually agree in their nature,

abilities, characteristics and circumstances; universalizability of moral principles is quite intelligibly and meaningfully possible. And expressions like 'I', 'me', 'you', 'this', 'that', 'a' and so on which can be used as proper names do not debar moral principle from being applicable to all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances.

It would be a mistake to think that expressions like 'I', 'you', 'me', 'him', 'this', 'that', 'a' etc. used in the formulation of universalizability of moral principle debar it from being of universal type. Because these expressions occur in the statement with the term 'similar' in the forms of 'similar to me', 'similar to him', 'similar to this', 'similar to that' etc.. And it is the nature of the term 'similar', being a relational term, that it goes beyond the individuality of 'me', 'him', 'this', 'that' etc.. If someone makes a contrary claim, that is, if he says that the use of term 'similar' does not go beyond the individuality, then thereby he would be committed to accept that the expressions like 'me', 'him', 'this', 'that' etc., are exactly equivalent to the expressions 'similar to me', 'similar to him', 'similar to this', 'similar to that' respectively. But to say this is absurd because both sorts of the expressions are not equivalent in their nature or functions. Therefore, it is intelligible to accept that the use of the term 'similar' goes

beyond the individuality. And the expressions 'I', 'you', 'me', 'him', 'a', 'this', 'that', the so-called proper names, do not debar moral principle from being universal.

The same point can also be made from another angle. The use of the term 'all' in the form of universalizability of moral principle is a universal quantifier. And being a universal quantifier, it goes beyond a necessary reference to certain individuals. This is true from the very meaning of the term 'universal quantifier' itself. To deny this would imply the failure to understand the nature of the term 'all'. Hence, it is intelligible to accept that the expressions like 'I', 'you', 'me', 'him', 'this', 'that' etc., do not debar moral principle from being of universal type.

We may, thus, conclude that universalizability is an essential feature of moral principle which any principle to be a moral principle must satisfy. But this is only a necessary condition\*, not a sufficient condition\*\* of a principle being a moral principle, social, legal, religious, mathematical

\* A condition C is a necessary condition of something's being a P if that thing cannot be P without condition C's being satisfied; that is to say, condition C must be satisfied if something is to be P.

\*\* A condition C is a sufficient condition of something's being a P if its satisfaction guarantees that thing is P; that is to say, if condition C is satisfied, the thing must be a P.

and logical principles also do have this peculiar characteristic, but they are not moral principles. For example, 'Always drive your car on the left side of the road' is a universal principle, but this is a legal and not a moral principle. Therefore, it is logically correct to say that morality implies universalizability but it is logically incorrect to say that universalizability also implies morality.

## CHAPTER III

### Prescriptivity

In the second chapter we saw that it is the nature of moral principles that if they hold in one case they also at the same time hold in all cases of the same kind. What constitutes a reason for a particular kind of principle to be a moral principle in one case, the same constitutes a reason for the same principle to be at the same time a moral principle in all cases of the same kind (this follows from the meaning of 'reason'). But this is not a peculiar characteristic which can be said to be found only in the case of moral principles. This characteristic is invariably found in all the uses of the concept of principle (i.e. nature, logical, mathematical, legal, social, religious etc.), as we have explained in the first and the second chapters. So, moral principles can't be distinguished from other kinds of principles on the basis of universalizability alone. If moral principles are not distinguishable from other kinds of principles on the basis of universalizability, let us examine some other features of moral principles which can enable us to distinguish moral principles from other kinds of principles.

Consider, for example, the case of moral principle P (P stands for: 'Everyone ought to promote everyone's interest'). Supposing X sincerely accepts that P is a moral principle for

him, one thing which obviously appears to follow from his assertion is that P, prima facie, enjoins upon him some action. This follows from the use of P as a moral principle itself. Since moral principles are principles of action, a principle of action can't be the principle of action unless it enjoins some action upon those who sincerely accept it (this follows from the concept of principle of action). The principles of action are not description of how something does in fact behave, but rather are prescriptions as to how human beings ought to behave or govern their conduct in certain kind of circumstances. Of course, it is an obvious fact that they do not prescribe the same kind of action upon all persons in all circumstances. This we have seen during our discussion of the universalizability principle. This is also true that principles of action are sometimes broken by many people, but this does not imply that they do not enjoin upon them some actions or that their prescriptions are negated. To deny this would imply that it is a misuse of the term 'principle of action'. Suppose, X says that he sincerely accepts that P is a moral principle for him, but P does not enjoin upon him the performance or avoidance of the action which it recommends or forbids. There would be no difficulty in seeing how it would mean that he does not accept P as a genuine moral principle for him at all. Refusal to admit that



P enjoins some action negates the acceptance of P as a genuine moral principle. Without enjoining some action the use of P as a moral principle cannot become a legitimate one, because the concept of moral principle as a principle of action always involves the admission of some action that is enjoined by the principle in question. One cannot say that moral principles are not principles of actions. In saying this the speaker would be implying that he does not know the meaning of the term 'moral principle' at all. If X makes a contrary claim, that is, if he says that he sincerely accepts that P is a moral principle for him but P does not enjoin upon him some action, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principles'. To deny that a particular action is being enjoined, being an essential part of the principle of action, makes the use of P as a genuine moral principle logically impossible. It implies that there is an implicative relation between moral principle and its enjoining some action, because the latter always follows from the former being a part of the meaning of the term moral principle. Hence X's genuine use of P as a moral principle necessarily commits him to accept the act/s which the principle enjoins upon him.

But the use of 'enjoin' does not carry any sense in the case of P unless the operational part of P is accepted.

When X sincerely accepts that P enjoins upon him some action (let us say actions of kind A) in certain kind of circumstances (let's say in the circumstances of kind C), then thereby it follows that he also accepts the operational part of P which it enjoins upon him. This follows from the use of 'enjoin'. Without some sort of operation, (say, prescription or imposition), the use of 'enjoin' cannot come into operation. The concept of enjoin always involves in its use, the concept of operation. How can some rule or principle be said to enjoin some action upon someone without enjoining upon him the operation of that action. If X says that P does not enjoin upon him the operation of ( i.e. the process of carrying out or doing) something, then thereby it would imply that he does not accept that P enjoins upon him a certain kind of actions at all. This follows from the use of 'enjoin' in the context of moral principle. Denial of the operational part of P negates the acceptance of P as enjoining some action. There is no principle of action which enjoins some action but does not enjoin the performance of that action in a certain kind of circumstances. If X holds a different view, that is, if he says that he sincerely accepts that P enjoins upon him some actions but P does not enjoin upon him the operation of something in a certain kind of circumstances, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and

misuses the term 'enjoin' in the case of moral principle. Rejection of the operation, being an essential part of the principle of action, makes the acceptance of P as enjoining some action logically impossible. It implies that there is an implicative (in logical sense) relation between moral principle's enjoining and its operation, because the latter always follows from the concept of the former.

Supposing that X sincerely accepts that P enjoins upon him certain operation, i.e. performance of actions of kind A in circumstances of kind C. Now, if X sincerely accepts that P enjoins upon him the performance of actions of kind A in circumstances of kind C, then thereby it follows that he ought to act in accordance with P in the relevant circumstances. This follows from our acceptance of a moral principle as enjoining upon us performance of certain action, i.e. the actions we are told that we ought to do. Moral principle does not merely enjoin some actions but also binds the person who accepts the principle to do something or to make certain change in the states of affairs. They are obligatory principle. It is entirely different thing that moral principles are broken by some people in certain circumstances, but that does not imply that their obligation is negated. They still remain obligatory. Hence if X says that it is not the case that he ought to act on P to bring into effect the actions of kind A

in the circumstances of kind C, then thereby it would imply that he does not at all accept that P enjoins upon him the performance of actions of kind A in the circumstances of kind C. Negation of 'ought' negates the acceptance of P in its prescriptive sense. This follows from the use of 'performance' in the context of moral principle. How can something be said to enjoin upon someone, the performance of some action without enjoining upon him the obligation to follow the operation in the relevant circumstances? If X does not hold such a view, that is, if he says that he sincerely accepts that P enjoins upon him, the performance of actions of kind A, in the relevant circumstances of kind C, but it is not the case that he ought to act on P to bring into effect actions of kind A in the relevant circumstances of kind C, or he ought not to act in accordance with P in the relevant circumstances, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the terms 'enjoin' and 'performance' in case of moral principle. Denial of 'ought' makes the use of P in its operational sense logically impossible. It implies that the genuine use of moral principle so binds the person (who sincerely accepts the principle) that he ought to obey the principle in the relevant circumstances.

Again, let us assume that X sincerely accepts that he ought to act in accordance with moral principle P in the

relevant circumstances. If X sincerely accepts that he ought to act in accordance with P in the relevant circumstances, then he is thereby committed in turn to doing accordingly in the actual relevant circumstances, if he is able to carry the prescription of 'ought' into practice. This follows from the use of 'ought' in the concept of moral principle. Without practical performance the prescription of 'ought' does not carry any sense. The intelligibility of 'ought' consists in doing according to the prescription of 'ought' in the actual circumstances, if the agent is in a position to carry out the prescription implicit in 'ought'. If X says that he will not act in accordance with P in the relevant circumstances when he is in a position to carry out the prescription, then thereby it would imply that he does not sincerely accept that he ought to act on P in the relevant circumstances at all. Because denial of the fact of doing negates the acceptance of 'ought' in its prescriptive meaning. How can we use the term 'ought' intelligibly while denying the necessity of doing something which the 'ought' enjoins? If X denies this, that is, if he says that he sincerely accepts that he ought to act on P in the relevant circumstances but he will not act accordingly in the actual relevant circumstances even if he is in a position to carry out the prescription implicit in 'ought', then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and

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misuses the term 'ought' in case of moral principle. Denial of the necessity of doing something (which is enjoined by the principle itself) in the actual circumstances makes the application of 'ought' in the context of moral principle logically impossible. It only means that the prescriptivity of 'ought' lies in doing in accordance with it in actual circumstances.

From the foregoing analysis, it thus follows that it is the nature of moral principles that they enjoin upon those persons who sincerely accept them the obligation to effect certain changes in the status of affairs or to do something in the relevant circumstances. This follows from the use of the term 'moral principle' itself. Moral principles are principles of action (or conduct) and a principle of action cannot be the principle of action unless it enjoins some action upon those who sincerely accepts it (this follows from the concept of principle of action). But the prescriptivity of moral principle can be brought into effect only by doing in accordance with the principle. If the operation of moral principle is denied, the prescriptivity of moral principle is rejected. In other words, the prescriptivity of moral principle consists in doing something in accordance with certain moral principle in actual relevant circumstances.

It is not the case that only ought-judgement guides the person to do something in the relevant circumstances or commits him in turn to doing accordingly in the relevant circumstances. Besides ought-judgements, 'good-judgements' also prescribe some action to someone to do in certain kind of circumstances. Of course, this is true that good-judgements do not prescribe action in the same fashion as ought-judgements do, but they prescribe indirectly which follows from the use of 'good' in the given context. For example, when X says, "It is good to keep one's promises", it follows from his assertion that he is, in effort, guiding himself or other persons indirectly to make certain changes in the states of affairs now or in future. This follows from the use of 'good' in the statement "It is good to keep one's promises". If X says that the use of 'good' in the statement does not prescribe any sort of action then thereby it would imply that he does not understand the nature of 'good'. Evaluative judgements are hypothetical prescriptions which propose some possible actions in future events of decisions and choices which are likely to arise in situations to which any evaluative judgements in question is related. So good-judgements, like ought-judgements, directly or indirectly prescribe certain kind of conduct or behaviour to those who sincerely use the term 'good' in moral context.

It is important to note that moral principle P does not only enjoin upon X the obligation to govern his conduct accordingly in the relevant circumstances when he accepts P in one's own case but P also enjoins upon him the obligation to govern his own conduct accordingly in the relevant circumstances when he prescribes P as a moral principle to other persons of the society or the community unless there are relevant differences in their cases. This is so because moral principles are universally prescriptive. Therefore, if X says to Y, 'You ought to act on moral principle P in the relevant circumstances but it is not the case that I myself ought to act on P in the relevant circumstances' without having any relevant differences then thereby it implies that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'. Rejection of the consequent makes the use of 'moral principle' in the antecedent logically impossible. This follows from the very meaning of moral principle itself. It should, however, be made clear that when X prescribes to Y 'You ought to act on moral principle P in relevant circumstances' Y is not thereby necessarily committed to govern his conduct accordingly in the relevant circumstances unless he himself accepts P as a moral principle. He would be committed only if he himself accepts that P is a moral principle for him.



Now the problem emerges: Does X's acceptance that he ought to act on moral principle P imply that he can do accordingly? Or does 'ought' imply 'can' in the case of moral principle? There are two ways to answer this question. In logical sense (of the use of the terms 'imply' and 'can') when X sincerely accepts that he ought to act on moral principle P then thereby it implies that he can do in accordance with moral principle P in relevant circumstances. Without 'can' the question of 'ought' cannot come into being in case of moral principle (the term 'can' here refers to 'can' of ability). It implies that the prescription or the acceptance of moral principle logically depends upon the presupposition of the facts of ability. Hence, if X says that he cannot act (the term 'cannot' here refers to 'cannot' of ability) on moral principle P in the relevant circumstances then thereby it would imply that X does not sincerely accept that he ought to act on moral principle P at all. Denial of the ability of doing negates the prescription of 'ought' attached to moral principle P. This follows from the very meaning of the term 'ought' itself. If X, on the other hand, says that he sincerely accepts that he ought to act on moral principle but he cannot act on moral principle P in relevant circumstances then thereby it implies that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'ought' in the

case of moral principle. Because denial of the 'can' of ability makes the acceptance of 'ought' in its prescriptive meaning (in case of moral principle) logically impossible.

In practical sense (of the use of the terms 'imply' and 'can') also, when X sincerely accepts that he ought to act on moral principle P, then it is thereby implied that he can act on moral principle P in relevant circumstances. For the same reason, without 'can' the question of 'ought' cannot come into being in the case of moral principle (the term 'can' here refers to 'can' of ability). It implies that the prescription or the acceptance of moral principle practically depends upon the presupposition of the facts of ability. Hence, if X says that he sincerely accepts that he ought to act on moral principle P but he cannot do (the term 'cannot' here refers to practical 'cannot' of ability) accordingly in the relevant circumstances, then thereby it implies that he practically makes an inconsistent statement. Because without 'can' the use of 'ought' practically becomes impossible.

But when X accepts that he ought to act on moral principle P then thereby it does not imply that he can act on moral principle whenever there is an occasion for acting (the term 'can' here refers to 'can' of success). It is quite possible that X may fail in doing in accordance with moral principle P under the actual circumstances because of some

physical or non-physical hindrances. If we accept that 'ought' implies (in logical sense) 'can' of success in each individual case then we would be committed to accept that whenever a person unsuccessfully tried to follow a prescription, there was no prescription for him as he in fact did not follow or accept the prescription. Failure or unsuccessful attempt to obey the prescription would negate the acceptance of moral principle. But this is certainly not how we shape or wish to shape our notion of moral principle. In case of failure or non-success we still meaningfully accept that we ought to act on moral principle. Hence, it is intelligible to accept that 'ought' does not imply 'can' of success.

Thus, there are two senses of 'can', that is, 'can' of ability and 'can' of success (or failure). The 'can' of ability refers to act-category independent of occasions for action, while the 'can' of success or failure refers to a particular act related to an occasion for action. Of course, this is absolutely true that we cannot be said to have ability, unless on most occasions, when we set ourselves to do the act, we succeed in doing it. In this sense one can say that success is the criterion of ability but even then the meaning of 'can' of ability would be different from the meaning of the 'can' of success. Similarly, there are two meanings of 'cannot' i.e. 'cannot' of ability and 'cannot' of success (or failure). The

'cannot' of ability refers to act-category while the 'cannot' of success (or failure) refers to a particular act related to an occasion for acting. Hence, when we say X's acceptance that he ought to act on moral principle P implies he can act on moral principle P in the relevant circumstances; we use the term 'can' in the sense of 'can' of ability not in the sense of 'can' of success.

Now, if X says that he ought to act in accordance with moral principle P but does not perform action A accordingly in the actual relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$  then one of the two following situation may arise : (a) either X is making an insincere statement or (b) X cannot do A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$ . The case (a) arises when doing A in accordance with moral principle P is thought to be within X's power in the circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$  but even then X does not do A. The case (b) arises when X sincerely accepts he ought to act on moral principle P but fails to carry the prescription of 'ought' into effect in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$  because of some physical or non-physical hindrances. The case (b) is quite consistent with the acceptance of moral principle because of two reasons: Firstly, when X says he cannot do action A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$ , he does not use the term 'cannot'

in the sense of 'cannot' of ability but instead he uses the term 'cannot' in the sense of 'cannot' of success (or failure). The 'cannot' of success (or failure) is consistent with 'ought' because the 'can' of success is not implicatively related with 'ought' as we have explained in the foregoing section. Hence, X can quite consistently say in the same breath that he sincerely accepts that he ought to act in accordance with moral principle P but he cannot do action A in accordance with P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$  without committing any inconsistency. If any contrary argument is given in the following form, it would be considered as a fallacious argument:

1. If X sincerely accepts that he ought to act in accordance with moral principle P, in the relevant circumstances, then he can do in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstances (the term 'can' here refers to 'can' of ability).
2. X cannot do action A in accordance with moral principle P, in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$  (the term 'cannot' here refers to 'cannot' of success).
3. Therefore, it is not the case that he ought to act in accordance with moral principle P, in this or the other relevant circumstances.

The term 'cannot' of success is not only consistent with 'ought' but it is also consistent with 'can' of ability. When

X says that he cannot do action A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$ , he does not assert that he cannot do action A in accordance with moral principle P in any relevant circumstances but instead he says he is failing to bring into effect action A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$ . This is what follows from his statement 'he cannot perform action A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$ '. It implies that X can quite consistently say in the same breath that he cannot do action A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$ , but he can do action A in accordance with moral principle P in other relevant circumstances without committing any fallacy.

Secondly, when X uses the term 'cannot' in the statement that he cannot do action A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$ , he does not use the term 'cannot' in the sense of 'will not', that is, he does not assert that he will not do action A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$ , nor he says that he will not do action A in accordance with moral principle P in any relevant circumstances but instead he says that he is failing to bring into effect action A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance

$C_1$  at time  $t_1$ . It implies that he can quite consistently say that he cannot do action A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$  but could have done action A if he had overcome certain difficulties or he will do action A in accordance with moral principle P in other relevant circumstances getting over the difficulties involved. Hence, the case (b) is quite consistently possible. But such case has to be explained with some justifying reason/s. Because the use of the term 'cannot' in the statement 'I cannot do action A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$ ' contextually opens the question of Why? which X must answer by offering some justifying reason/s to make his statement consistent and intelligible.

It is quite possible for X that he may fail in giving some justifying reason/s to make his assertion "I sincerely accept I ought to act in accordance with moral principle P but I cannot do action A in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$ " consistent and meaningful. But such a case would not constitute any counter example. Inability to giving reason is entirely different from denying to do accordingly in the relevant circumstances. In the former case the prescription of 'ought' is not negated while in the latter case the prescription is

negated. Hence, X can meaningfully say that he sincerely accepts that he ought to act in accordance with moral principle P in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$  but he does know why he is failing in doing action A in the relevant circumstance  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$  without committing fallacy of any sort. This answer may beg the question: How can you judge whether X is really unable to give justifying reason or he is telling a lie? Of course, this is a difficult task, but for those persons who do not have practical experiences or skills. A lay man may not be able to judge whether X is telling a lie or he is, in fact, unable to give justifying reason but practically an expert can judge very easily whether X is telling a lie or not. All that is required to judge is practical experiences and skill; nothing else. But this is a philosophically uninteresting situation. We have only to assume that there are veridical reports of genuine practical difficulties. What is at best possible is to see whether such difficulties do in fact arise in practical situation, however rare they may be.

We may, thus, conclude that prescriptivity is an essential feature of moral principle which any principle to be a moral principle must satisfy. But this is only a necessary not a sufficient condition of moral principle because this does not alone make a principle a moral one. There are other



principles i.e. social, legal, religious etc. which are prescriptive but are non-moral ones. For example, 'No one should smoke in railway compartments' is a prescriptive principle in its nature in the sense that it gives the direction not to smoke to those persons who are in such a compartment. If he is smoking, the principle guides him to stop smoking and if he is not smoking and wants to smoke then the principle guides him not to start smoking. But this is not a moral principle. Hence, morality implies prescriptivity but prescriptivity does not imply morality. Further, it is a mistake if it is thought that prescriptivity along with universalizability distinguishes, as Hare held<sup>\*</sup>, moral principles from non-moral principles. These features do not distinguish moral principles because social, legal or religious principles also do have these features but they are non-moral principles. Hence, morality implies prescriptivity and universalizability but prescriptivity and universalizability together do not imply morality.

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\* R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason, Oxford University Press (1965) p. 30 ff.

## CHAPTER IV

### Sanction

We have seen in the preceding chapter that moral principles are action-guiding. They enjoin some action upon those who sincerely accept them (either in one's own case or in the case of others, provided there are no relevant differences between them), i.e., to do something or to effect certain changes in the states of affair in certain kind of circumstances. But at the same time we have also seen that this is not a peculiar characteristic of moral principles because this characteristic being an essential one for the principles of action or conduct in general, is invariably found in all uses of the principles of action/conduct i.e. legal, social, religious etc.. Nor we can say that both prescriptivity and universalizability together differentiate moral principles from other kinds of principles because social, legal and religious principles are not only prescriptive but are also universal in their nature being one of the species of 'principle' as we have seen in the first and the second chapters. Hence let us further enquire if there are some other features which can enable us to differentiate moral principles from other sorts of principles.

Supposing that X sincerely accepts that P is a moral principle for him, what does this imply? Does it not imply

that X does sanction P? Surely it does. When X sincerely asserts that P is a moral principle for him then thereby it implies that X also sanctions\* P as a genuine moral principle for him (the term 'sanction' here refers to 'approval'). This follows from the use of 'moral principle' itself. Without 'sanction' the acceptance of moral principle cannot be affected. If X says that he does not sanction P as a moral principle for him then thereby it would imply that he does not sincerely accept P is a genuine moral principle at all or the principle which he accepts as a moral principle is not a genuine moral principle at all. This follows from the use of P itself. If X does not accept this, that is, if he says that he sincerely accepts that P is a moral principle for him but he does not sanction P as a genuine moral principle for him then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'. Refusal to accept the 'sanction' being contrary to what is implied by the use of moral principle makes the application of P as a moral principle logically impossible. It follows that there is an implicative relation between moral principle, and its sanction because the concept of moral principle always involves the concept of

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\* The term 'sanction'(v), here is used only in the sense of 'to countenance', 'to enforce' or 'to approve with one's own authority' and not primarily in the sense in which Bentham and Mill have spoke of the 'sanctions'.

sanction whenever it is applied. Without 'sanction' the genuine use of moral principle becomes impossible. Hence X's meaningful acceptance of P as a moral principle for him necessarily commits him to accept that he also sanctions P.

X's acceptance of P as a genuine moral principle does not only commit him to accept that he sanctions P when he accepts P in his own case but P also commits him to accept that he sanctions P when he sincerely prescribes P as a moral principle to other persons of the society or the community. The reason being the same that without 'sanction' the use of moral principle cannot be affected. If X says that he does not sanction P then thereby it would imply that he does not sincerely prescribe P as a moral principle to other persons of the society or the principle P which he prescribes to other persons of the society is not a genuine moral principle at all. This follows from the very use of 'moral principle' itself. If X holds a different view, that is, if he says that he sincerely prescribes P as a genuine moral principle to other persons of the society but he does not sanction P as a moral principle then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'. Denial of the sanction makes the prescription of P as a moral principle to other persons of the society logically impossible. It implies that the use of the concept of moral principle does

not only involve the concept of sanction in it when it is applied in one's own case, but it also involves the concept of sanction in it when it is applied in the case of other persons of the society. Hence X's meaningful prescription of P as a moral principle to other persons of the society necessarily commits him to accept that he also sanctions P.

But this point should be taken into consideration that when X sincerely accepts and prescribes P as a genuine moral principle in his own case and in the case of others he is not thereby necessarily committed to get his accepted moral principle sanctioned by other persons of the society. This is quite compatible with the very meaning or use of 'moral principle' itself. Because without 'external sanction' the use of 'moral principle' is quite intelligible. X can quite consistently and intelligibly assert in the same breath that P is a moral principle for him or the other persons of the society without getting P sanctioned by other persons of the society. Of course, practically it may be required that X should get his accepted moral principle P sanctioned by other persons of the society or the community. But this is only a contingent condition of a moral principle. This is not a necessary condition of a moral principle in this sense because it does not necessarily follow from the concept of moral principle.

Further, let us assume that X sincerely sanctions P as a moral principle for him. Now the moment X sincerely sanctions P as a moral principle for him, he is thereby committed to obey his sanctioned principle P in the relevant circumstances. This follows from the use of 'sanction' in the case of moral principle. Without 'obeying', the use of 'sanction' becomes unintelligible and inapplicable. In other words, the use of sanction does not carry sense unless what is sanctioned is obeyed. If X intentionally and without any overriding reason, violates P then thereby it would imply that he does not sanction P as a moral principle for him at all. Violation of the principle negates the sanction of the principle. If X makes a contrary claim, that is, if he says that he sincerely sanctions P as a moral principle for him but he ought to violate P in the relevant circumstances or it is not the case that he ought to obey his sanctioned principle P in the relevant circumstances, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'sanction' in the case of moral principle. Denial of the resolution to obey P, being contrary to what is implied by the nature of moral principle, makes the sanction of P as a moral principle logically impossible.

X's sanction of P as a moral principle does not only bind him to obey P in the relevant circumstances when he

sanctions P in one's own case but P also binds him to accept that he advises other persons to obey the principle P in the relevant circumstances when he sanctions P as a moral principle in case of other persons of the society or the community. This follows from the use of 'sanction' in the case of moral principle. If X advises other persons of the society to violate the principle P in the relevant circumstances then thereby it would imply that he does not sanction P as a moral principle for other persons of the society at all. Because deliberate violation of the principle negates the sanction of the principle. If X makes a contrary claim, that is, if he says that he sincerely sanctions P as a moral principle for other persons of the society but they ought to violate P in the relevant circumstances then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'sanction' in the case of moral principle. Advice to disobey the principle P makes the sanction of P as a genuine moral principle for other persons of the society logically impossible. It means that there is an implicative relation between moral principle's sanction and its obeying since the concept of the former always involves the concept of the latter in it. Thus X's sanction of P as a genuine moral principle for himself or the other persons of the society necessarily binds him to accept that he or other persons of the society ought to obey P.

in relevant circumstances.

From the foregoing analysis it thus becomes clear that it is the nature of moral principles that whenever someone accepts them, he also at the same time approves them. The agent is not only thereby committed to sanction them but also thereby committed not to violate or advise others to violate them in the relevant circumstances.

Now the question arises: What is the source of sanction? Or what is the authority behind the sanction? Or who is the authority from which the sanction attached to moral principle proceeds?

The source or the authority from which the sanction attached to moral principle proceeds is the individual's own conscience. The term 'conscience' signifies the notions or the sense of right and wrong which the individual acquires from the process of reasoning, environment, subjective attitudes, experiences etc.. These notions develop over a long period since childhood, not in a day or two. In the process of development sometimes it happens that what his conscience sanctions at time  $t_1$ , the same thing it may or may not sanction at time  $t_2$ . Such cases are found when the individual does not take all the possible considerations into account at the time of sanction or leaves some relevant factors out of consideration due to lack of knowledge or because of some other obstacles.



Or else, it may be due to some significant change in one's views or attitudes. But such cases do not constitute any counter example, because in each case what is accepted as a moral principle is always sanctioned by his conscience at a particular time. Hence, the sense in which we are using the term 'conscience' should not be confused with the following senses in which it may be applied or has been applied by some philosophers:

- (i) The voice of God that tells us what is right and what is wrong.
- (ii) The additional eye which directly perceives what is right and what is wrong.
- (iii) The intellect as the faculty of forming judgements about right and wrong in individual acts.
- (iv) The process of reasoning that the intellect goes through to reach the judgement of right and wrong.
- (v) The judgement of right and wrong itself which results from the process of reasoning.
- (vi) The feeling of approval or disapproval caused by psychological factors.

All these various senses of conscience, taken singly do not signify the correct use of the term 'conscience'. They

have each been mistaken, in one way or the other, for conscience. One thing should be clear that there has been some divergence of views regarding the nature of conscience as the authority of sanction attached to moral principle. But what has not been denied is the fact that there must be some authority to support and sanction the moral principle.

The individual's conscience does not only sanction moral principle, but it also binds or puts pressure upon him to govern his conduct accordingly in the relevant circumstances, since the force or the pressure which enforces him to feel that he is under obligation to obey the principle proceeds from his conscience. That is why moral principle is often called self-imposed principle and its sanction is called internal, not external. When he infringes what he imposes upon him or acts contrary to his own moral principles, he feels guilt, remorse, shame, regret and uneasiness.\* Such sorts of feelings he expresses by making statements like 'I infringed my own (sanctioned) principle', 'I did not do what was morally required of me, 'I have performed a morally wrong action', 'I acted contrary to my own principle' and so on. But when he obeys his

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\* Guilt, remorse, shame, regret and uneasiness all these are a kind of moral punishments or penalties which are issued by his conscience when he does not act what he thinks he ought to do or does act contrary to his own sanctioned moral principle.

sanctioned principle, he feels happiness and satisfaction.\*

These feelings he expresses by making the statements like 'I obeyed my (sanctioned) moral principle', 'I did what I thought I ought to do', 'I have put my moral principles into practice' and so on. These negative and positive psychological features attached to moral principles enforce the individual to obey the principles in the relevant circumstance. Besides internal pressures, external pressures also contingently work upon him. When he does not act according to, or acts contrary to, what he prescribes to other persons of the society or the community, he invites hostility, contempt, unfriendliness, hatred etc. from them. But when he acts what he prescribes to them, he gets love, affection, respect, assistance and commendation in various forms from them. These external negative and positive features attached to moral principles enforce the prescriber to obey the prescribed principles in the relevant circumstances.

Two points should be taken into account. The first one is that positive and negative features vary in degree because the pressure attached to moral principles vary in degree. Some moral principles are sanctioned strongly and some moral

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\* Happiness and satisfaction are a kind of moral rewards which are issued by his conscience when he obeys his principles or acts against what is morally justifiable.

principles are sanctioned with relatively lesser force. Because of this, when they are obeyed and disobeyed in a particular relevant circumstance, they arouse more or less positive and negative psychological feelings in him. How strongly they will arouse such feelings solely depends upon the pressure attached to them for which we cannot give any statistical account. The second point is that the individual feels guilt, remorse, shame, regret and uneasiness only when he himself infringes his own sanctioned principles not in the case when they are infringed upon by other persons of the society to whom the prescription of moral principle is directed. The reason being that he himself does not infringe upon his prescribed moral principles but they are infringed upon by other persons of the society.

The sanction attached to moral principle does not necessarily exclude the individual's subjective attitudes like desires and wants-because the source from which the sanction proceeds is his own conscience and conscience, as we said, is partly derived from his own subjective attitudes. And if conscience is partly derived from his subjective attitudes then the sanction which proceeds from it will also implicitly or explicitly include his subjective attitudes. This is the reason why he also desires and wants what his conscience sanctions for himself as well as for other persons of the

society or the community.

Non-moral principles are also sanctioned but the way they are sanctioned differs from how moral principles are. Legal principles are sanctioned by the legal authorities independent of the individuals' principles and attitudes and are imposed upon them by those persons who represent the government of the society with the help of physical forces i.e. police and military etc.. When someone infringes upon legal principles he is required to undergo physical and non-physical tortures which are given by the authorized representatives of the state, according to well-defined principles. If he obeys the legal principles he enjoys certain rights and privileges under the protection of the government. Thus, legal principles are sanctioned and imposed by the external authorities of the government of the country independent of the individuals' principles.

Social principles are also sanctioned and imposed by the external authorities. Of course, they are not well-defined principles as we find in the case of legal principles but the way they are sanctioned does not differ from legal principles. The recognised authority of the society or the community sanctions social principles often independent of the individual's approvals or disapprovals and imposes such principles upon them with the help of community pressure. The person who

infringes upon social principles invites hostility, contempt, disfavour, hatred, unfriendliness, withdrawal of important services and sometimes in traditional society, even expulsion from the society or the community. If he obeys social principles he gets respect, love, friendship, affection, help, services etc. in various ways from the people of his community. These positive and negative features attached to social principles enforce the individuals to obey the principles. Thus, social principles are also sanctioned and imposed by the external authority.

Religious principles are sanctioned and imposed by the religious authority, i.e. God. It is believed that when the person infringes upon religious principles, he gets physical and non-physical tortures in the present or the future life or in both the periods of life. And if he obeys religious principles he gets good fortunes, kindness, favours etc. from God. This kind of negative and positive pressures attached to religious principles bind the individuals of a religious community to obey the principles. Thus we see that the sanctions attached to legal, social and religious principles are external in the sense that they proceed from external authorities. While in case of moral principles, as we have already explained, the sanction proceeds from the individual's own conscience, not from external authorities.

The individual himself sanctions and imposes moral principle upon him without external enforcement. In this respect moral principles differ from non-moral principles.

We may, thus, conclude that the sanction feature is an essential feature of moral principle which any principle to be a moral principle must satisfy. But this is not a sufficient condition of moral principle. It does not alone make a principle a moral principle. There are principles which are intelligibly sanctioned but they are not moral principles at all. For example, we may sanction 'One should keep sufficient petrol in one's car while going on a long journey' as a principle but thereby it does not follow that because we sanction 'One should keep sufficient petrol in one's car while going on a long journey' as a principle, therefore this is a moral principle. Hence, it is logically correct to say that morality implies sanction but it is logically incorrect to say that sanction also implies morality. It would be an obvious mistake if someone defines 'morality' in terms of 'sanction'.

## CHAPTER V

### Autonomy

We have seen in the previous chapter (IV) that it is the nature of moral principles that they are sanctioned and imposed by the individual upon himself without external enforcement of any sort. But we have also seen in the same chapter that the sanction is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition of moral principle, because it does not alone render a principle a moral principle. Besides sanction, the other features like universalizability and prescriptivity are also necessarily required. It would be absurd if we were to hold that non-moral principles are always those which are devoid of any sanction. They too are sometimes sanctioned principles but the way they are sanctioned differ from the way moral principles are. Non-moral principles are sanctioned by the external authority while moral principles as we have already seen, are sanctioned by the internal authority of the individual. Besides sanction, let us find out some other feature which can help us to differentiate moral principles from other kinds of principles in a more adequate way.

Let us suppose that X sincerely accepts that P is a genuine moral principle for him. What does this imply? Does this imply that P is dependent on any particular system of



principles of the society or the community which may be prevalent during any given period of time and which may be determined or authorised by some external authority i.e. imposed either by the government or by the community?

Definitely not. When X sincerely says that he sanctions P as a moral principle for himself, then thereby it implies that the principle P which he sanctions in his own case is autonomous (or independent) of any particular system of principles of the society or the community. This follows from the very nature of moral principle itself. Without 'autonomy' the application of moral principle cannot come into effect. Whenever the concept of moral principle is applied, it's use always presupposes (or involves) the autonomy of the principle. It may, however, be noted here that the term 'the principles of society' has a broader application. It is not only confined to the conventions, customs and politico- legal principles but also includes the principles of religion or any other principles of this kind prevailing in the society in any given period of time. All these are obviously determined or authorised by some external authority imposed by the government, by the community or by God. If X says that the principle P which he accepts as a genuine moral principle is not autonomous in its nature but it is one of the principles of a particular system of principles of society, then thereby it would imply

that P is not a moral principle at all but, instead, P is a principle of the society. Non-acceptance of the autonomy of P negates the acceptance of P as a genuine moral principle. How can a moral principle qua moral principle be only the part of a particular system of principles of the society whose principles are not necessarily moral one? If X, on the contrary, says that he sincerely accepts P as a moral principle for him to do certain kinds of actions but P is not autonomous in its nature, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'. Denial of the autonomy of P, being contrary to what is implied by the concept of moral principle makes the use of P as a genuine moral principle impossible. It implies that there is an implicative (in logical sense) relation between moral principle and its autonomy because the use of the former always involves the concept of the latter in it which makes the application of moral principle intelligible and meaningful. To say otherwise is to make the use of moral principle impossible. Hence X's acceptance of P as a moral principle in his own case necessarily commits him to accept that P is autonomous in its nature also, that is, P is not a part of any particular system of principles of the society or the community.

X's acceptance of P as a genuine moral principle does not only commit him to accept that P is autonomous in its

nature but the use of P also commits him to accept that P is autonomous in its nature when he prescribes or directs P as a genuine moral principle for other persons of the society or the community. The reason being the same that the use of the concept of moral principle always involves the autonomy of the principle. This also similarly follows from the very meaning of moral principle itself. If X says that the principle P which he prescribes as a moral principle to other persons of the society is not autonomous in its nature but instead is a part of a particular system of principles of the society, then thereby it would imply that the principle P which he prescribes to other persons of the society is not a genuine moral principle at all, but instead is a principle of the society without necessarily being a moral one. Denial of the autonomy of P negates the prescription of P as a genuine moral principle to other persons of the society in the same way as it is the case in respect to oneself. If X, on the other hand, says that he sincerely prescribes P as a genuine moral principle to other persons of the society but P is not, in fact, autonomous in its nature, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'. Negation of the autonomy, being contrary to what is implied by the use of moral principle, makes the prescription of P as a genuine moral principle to other persons of the society

impossible in the same manner as it was shown to be impossible for someone to accept a moral principle which is not autonomous, i.e. which is not independent of extraneous authority. It implies that the concept of moral principle does not only involve the concept of autonomy when it is used in one's own case but it also involves the concept of autonomy when it is used in the case of other persons of the society. Hence X's meaningful prescription of P as a moral principle to other persons of the society necessarily commits him to accept that P is autonomous in its nature.

From the above analysis it thus becomes clear that it is the nature of moral principles that they are independent (or autonomous) of any particular system of the principles of the society or the community which may be prevalent during any given period of time and which may be determined or authorised by some external authority i.e. imposed either by the government or by the community.

Since moral principles are independent of any particular system of principles of the society or the community, they are neither justifiable with reference to them nor they are derivable from them. Moral principles are not justifiable with reference to any particular system of principles of the society or the community, because the principles of society or community are not necessarily moral ones. If they are

themselves not moral principles then they cannot be the justifying principles for moral ones. For the justification of moral principles it is necessary that the principle with reference to which moral principles are justified must be itself moral. If a principle is not a moral one in its nature then it cannot be the justifying principle for moral principles. Since, as a matter of fact, the principles of society or community are not themselves necessarily moral by virtue of being what they are, moral principles are not justifiable with reference to the principles of society. Whether non-moral principles are justifiable with reference to moral principles or not is a different question and this we will not discuss here because it is not important in the present context. Moral principles are not derivable from the principles of society or community for the reason that the principles of society or community are not necessarily moral ones. And if they are not themselves moral then moral principles cannot be derived from them. For the derivability of moral principles it is essential that the principle from which moral principles are derived must be moral one. If the fundamental principle is itself non-moral then the derivability of moral principles logically becomes impossible. And since, as matter of fact, the principles of society are not necessarily moral, moral principles are not derivable from them. Of course, it is

true that many times we accept and prescribe the principles of society as morally justifiable principles for ourselves as well as for other persons of the society for doing certain kind of actions in certain kind of circumstances. But such cases do not allow us to say that we derive moral principles from the principles of society. In such cases we do not, in fact, derive moral principles from the principles of society but, instead, what we do is that we critically examine the principles of society from moral point of view and when we find them morally justifiable, that is, in accordance with our moral principles, then we accept and prescribe them to other persons of the society as morally justifiable principles. Hence, when we accept and prescribe the principles of society in the moral context we do not accept and prescribe them on the ground that they are the principles of society. We accept and prescribe them on the ground that they are morally justifiable principles.

When X sincerely accepts that P is a moral principle, he is not thereby only committed to accept that P is independent of any particular system of the principles of society or community but he is also thereby committed to accept that he himself determines, authorizes and imposes P upon himself to govern his conduct accordingly in the relevant circumstances without external enforcement of any kind. The

consequent logically follows from the antecedent because moral principles are self determined and self-imposed principles of action and such principles of action by their nature implicitly or explicitly involve the autonomy of the individual, that is, his independent determination, acceptance, authorization and imposition of the principle upon himself to govern his conduct accordingly in the relevant circumstances. It implies that acting on moral principle necessarily presupposes the autonomy of the individual. But the individual who accepts moral principles would be called an autonomous individual only if he himself determines, authorizes and imposes the principle upon himself without external enforcement. If X does not do so, then he will not be called an autonomous individual nor his acting on the principle will be called an autonomous act. And if his acting on the principle is not autonomous then he does not act morally at all. This follows from our criteria of application of moral principle itself. Hence, if X says that he does not autonomously determine, authorize and impose P upon himself but P is determined, authorized and imposed upon himself by the external authority then thereby it would imply that he does not act morally at all because acting on moral principle always presupposes the autonomy of the individual who accepts the principle. If X does not accept this view and claims that he sincerely accepts P as a moral

principle for him but he himself does not autonomously determine, authorize and impose P upon himself but P is determined, authorized and imposed by some external authority then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'. Denial of one's autonomy, being contrary to what is implied by the concept of moral principle, makes the acceptance of P as a moral principle logically impossible. It implies that the application of moral principle always presupposes the autonomy of the individual who applies the principle in relevant circumstances. Hence, X's meaningful acceptance of P as a genuine moral principle necessarily commits him to accept that he himself determines authorizes and imposes P upon himself without external enforcement of any sort.

X's acceptance of P as a moral principle does not only commit him to accept that he autonomously determines, authorizes and imposes P upon himself without external enforcement of any sort when he accepts P in one's own case, but P also commits him to accept that he autonomously determines and authorizes P as a moral principle when he prescribes P to other persons of the society or the community. For the same reason the use of the concept of moral principle always implicitly or explicitly involves the autonomy of the individual for those who prescribe the principle as well for those to whom



the prescription is given. If X says that he does not autonomously prescribe P as a moral principle to other persons of the society or the community but he prescribes P to other persons of the society or the community under the enforcement of the external authority then thereby it would imply that the principle P which he prescribes to other persons of the society or the community is not a moral principle at all, but instead is a principle of the society or the community. This does follow from whatever we have said concerning the nature of moral principle itself. Rejection of the autonomy of the prescriber negates the fact of morally prescribing P as a moral principle to other persons of the society. The prescriber in that case, would not prescribe what he thinks is morally justifiable principle for other persons of the society but instead he would prescribe what the external authority enforces upon him to prescribe. If X, on the contrary, says that he sincerely prescribes P as a moral principle to other persons of the society but he himself does not determine, and authorize P as a moral principle to other persons of the society then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'. In such statement X does not only misuse the term 'moral principle' but he also misuses the term 'prescribe' in moral context. This follows from the very meaning of the

phrase 'He prescribes'/'I prescribe'. For, denial of the autonomy of the prescriber, being contrary to what is implied by the nature of moral principle, makes the prescription of P as a moral principle to other persons of the society or the community logically impossible. It implies that the use of moral principle does not only involve the autonomy of the individual when he accepts the principle in one's own case but it also involves the autonomy of the individual when he prescribes moral principle in case of other persons of the society or the community. Hence X's genuine prescription of P as a moral principle to other persons of the society necessarily commits him to accept that he autonomously prescribes P as a moral principle to other persons of the society without external enforcement of any sort.

Two points, however, stand in need of some clarification. The first one is that the autonomy of moral principle is different from the autonomy of the individual who accepts the principle. When we say that moral principles are autonomous in nature we mean that they are independent of any particular system of principles of the society or the community which may be prevalent during any given period of time and which may be determined or authorized by some external authority imposed either by the government or by the community. But when we say that the individual who accepts moral principle is

an autonomous individual we mean that he himself determines, authorizes and imposes moral principle upon himself to govern his conduct accordingly in the relevant circumstances without the external constraint. Both the senses of 'autonomous' are logically connected with moral principle but in different ways. Hence, these two senses of 'autonomous' should not be confused.

The second point is that when we say that the individual, who accepts moral principle autonomously determines, authorizes and imposes moral principle upon himself we do not mean that he determines, authorizes and imposes moral principle upon himself independent of his subjective attitudes, preferences, material conditions etc.. We mean only that he himself determines, authorizes and imposes moral principle upon himself without external constraint of any kind (physical or non-physical). Hence, there is a difference in these two ways of talking about the autonomy of the moral agent. If this difference is overlooked some confusions are likely to occur. That is, it is not one and the same thing to hold that the moral principles are determined, authorized and imposed not independent of the individual's subjective attitudes and preferences and to say that moral principles need be independent of individual's subjective attitudes and preferences. In fact, moral principles are not independent of the individual's

attitudes and preferences because the source from which the determination, authorization and imposition of moral principles proceed is the individual's own 'conscience' and the individual's conscience does not exclude his subjective attitudes and preferences as we have already explained in the chapter on 'Sanction'. Hence, when we say that moral principles are autonomously determined, authorized and imposed by the individual himself we do not say that he determines, authorizes and imposes moral principle upon himself independent of his subjective attitudes and preferences.

We may, thus, conclude that the feature of 'autonomy' is an essential feature of moral principle which any principle to be a moral principle must satisfy. But this is not a sufficient condition of moral principle because this alone does not make a principle a moral principle. There are principles which may be said to be legitimately autonomous principle in nature but they are non-moral. For example, 'When we are in need, we should ask for help, but we should never help another person when he is in need' is an autonomous principle which X may accept as his guiding principle but this is not a moral principle. This principle does not satisfy other conditions of moral principle i.e. universalizability. Hence, morality necessarily implies autonomy but autonomy does not imply morality. It implies that morality is not absolutely definable in terms of its autonomous character.

## CHAPTER VI

### Content

In the preceding chapter we have said that it is the nature of moral principles that they are independent of any particular system of principles of the society or the community which may be prevalent during any given period of time and which may be determined and authorized by some external authority, i.e. imposed either by the government or by the community. But we have also seen in the same chapter that the autonomy feature is only an essential but not a sufficient condition of moral principle because it alone does not make a principle a moral principle. Besides autonomy, other features like universalizability, prescriptivity and sanction are also required at the same time for a principle to be a moral one (as we have seen in the earlier chapters). But while discussing autonomy of moral principles we saw that it is their nature that they preserve the autonomy of the individual, that is, they are autonomously determined, authorized and imposed by the individual upon himself, without any external constraint. This characteristic we do not find in most non-moral principles. Unlike moral principles they are generally, though not necessarily always, determined and authorized by the external authority and imposed upon the individuals of the society irrespective of their choices and

preferences. In this respect we can legitimately say that moral principles differ in this respect from most of the non-moral principles. Although the autonomy of individual distinguishes moral principles from many a non-moral principle very clearly, yet in order to make the distinction sharper, let us find out some other feature so that we may understand the nature of moral principles more lucidly and may distinguish them from non-moral principles with greater ease.

Suppose, X sincerely accepts that the P is a genuine moral principle for him (to do actions of kind A in the circumstances of kind C). What more, besides what has already been discussed, does this imply? Does this imply that P is without any content? Surely not. When X asserts that P is a genuine moral principle for him, then thereby it implies that P has some content in it which constitutes a reason for X to say that P is a genuine moral principle for him. Thus, without 'content' the application of the concept of moral principle becomes impossible. In other words, without 'content' the use of moral principle cannot be affected. X can neither universalize nor prescribe nor even sanction P as a moral principle unless P does have some content in it. From practical point of view, what is universalized, prescribed and sanctioned is the content of moral principle (the term 'content' here signifies human well-being, welfare, interest, advantage, good,

'happiness' etc.). If X says that P does not have content of any sort in it then thereby it would imply that the principle P which he accepts as a genuine moral principle for him is not a moral principle at all. If, as we have already discussed, moral principles are principles of action and they enjoin upon the agent himself or the addressee or both, some action in a given situation, it must have some content which would constitute the direct aim or purpose of performing the action, i.e. some change in the state of affairs which is visualized and prescribed. Therefore, denial of the content, makes the acceptance and application of P as a moral principle impossible. It implies that there is an implicative relation between moral principle and its content because the use of the concept of moral principle always presupposes some content in it when it is applied. Hence, X's acceptance of P as a moral principle necessarily commits him to accept that P also has content in it which constitutes a reason for him to say that P is a moral principle for him.

X's acceptance of P as a moral principle does not only commit him to accept that P has some content in it when he accepts P in one's own case but P also commits him to accept that P has content in it when he prescribes or directs P as a genuine moral principle to other persons of the society or the community. Once again, without 'content' the prescription

of P as a moral principle can not have any application. It's prescription always presupposes some kind of content in it which constitutes a reason for him to prescribe P as a genuine moral principle to other persons of the society. If X says that when he prescribes P as a genuine moral principle to other persons of the society, it does not have any content in it, then thereby it would imply that the principle P which he prescribes to other persons of the society is not a moral principle at all. This follows from the use of moral principle since the denial of the content negates the possibility of prescribing P as a moral principle to other persons of the society. If X holds the opposite view, that is, if he says that he sincerely prescribes P as a moral principle to other persons of the society but P does not have content of any sort in it, then it would thereby imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'. Refusal to admit the content, being contrary to what is implied by the prescription of moral principle, makes the prescription of P as a moral principle practically impossible. It implies that the use of moral principle does not only presuppose the concept of content in it when it is applied in one's own case but it also presupposes the concept of content in it when it is directed to other persons of the society or the community. Hence, X's prescription of P as a genuine moral principle to



other persons of the society necessarily commits him to accept that P has content in it.

The relation between moral principle, reason and its content is an implicative one, because the former always presupposes the concept of the latter. For example, when X sincerely says that R is a reason for him for saying (or prescribing) that P is a genuine moral principle (to do actions of kind A in the circumstances of kind C), then thereby it implies that R has some content in it on the basis of which X says that R is a reason for P. This follows from the use of 'reason'. Without 'content' the use of reasons in moral context cannot be legitimate. If X says that R does not have content of any sort in it, then thereby it would imply that he does not accept R as a genuine reason for P at all. Denial of the content negates the acceptance of R as a reason for P. If X makes a contrary claim, that is, if he says that he sincerely accepts R as a reason for P but R does not have content of any sort in it, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'reason'. Denial of the content, being contrary to what is implied by the use of reason, makes acceptance of R as a reason for P logically impossible. Thus X's acceptance of R as a genuine reason for P necessarily commits him to accept that P must have content in it on the basis of which he says R is a reason for P.

The reason of moral principles vary because their contents vary. There is no specific content which can always be found attached to specific moral principles. Their contents may generally be found in either of these forms: (i) self-regarding, i.e. one's own well-being, welfare, satisfaction, interests, good, happiness etc. (ii) other-regarding i.e., others' well-being, welfare, satisfaction, interests, good, happiness etc. (iii) universal, i.e. all persons (including the agent's) well-being, welfare, satisfactions, interests, good, happiness etc. (which is, in fact, nothing but the combination of (i) and (ii)). So what would be the content of moral principle is a purely contingent fact. But in any case one can accept and authorize any sort of principle as a genuine moral principle with reference to either of them without committing any fallacy, for the reason that these various forms of content are non-formal and contingent. And being non-formal and contingent either of them can legitimately be accepted as the content of moral principles.

For example, X can quite consistently accept that the principle of Self-interest ('One ought to promote one's interest') is a genuine moral principle not only for himself but also for other persons of the society or the community on the ground that it promotes one's interest. Of course, he would be committing a fallacy if he says that the principle

of Self-interest is a moral principle only for him (i.e. he ought to promote his interest) but is not a moral principle for other persons of the society or the community (i.e. others ought not to promote their interests). If 'self-interest' constitutes a reason for him to justify his actions, it also at the same time constitutes a reason for him to approve that the principle of Self-interest is a moral principle for others (at least for those who are relevantly similar to him). This follows from the use of the principle of Self-interest. (How it does follow from the use of the principle of Self-interest as a morally justifiable principle, can be easily seen in the light of our discussion on universalizability in chapter II). But when X sincerely accepts and prescribes that the principle of Self-interest is a moral principle not only for him but is also a moral principle for other persons of the society or the community, he does not commit any fallacy. Because he consistently applies the principle of Self-interest in practice in one's own and in others' cases. Hence, merely on the basis of self-interest we cannot criticize and condemn X that he does not act in accordance with a genuine moral principle at all.

X's acting on the principle of Self-interest is also practically quite possible. The principle of Self-interest does not logically imply 'One ought to promote one's interest

at the cost of others' interest's' or 'One ought to promote one's interest only, not of others'. The principle of Self-interest implies only this much that one ought to promote one's interest. This is, of course, true that the principle of Self-interest does not logically imply that 'One ought to promote others interest'. But at least this is true that the principle of Self-interest does not contradict 'One ought to promote one's interest by promoting others' interest'. Hence, X can quite consistently promote his self-interest by promoting others' interest. Further, to act with reference to one's own interest and thus, to attempt to achieve one's own end, is not necessarily to act at the cost of or to the disadvantage of anyone else. One's own interest need not be in conflict with that of others.

Likewise, others' interests, well-being, welfare, satisfaction, good, happiness etc., can also be the content of moral principles without any inconsistency. For example, X can quite consistently accept that the principle of Benevolence ('One ought to promote others' interest') is a genuine moral principle on the ground that it promotes others' interest without committing any fallacy. Of course, he would be committing a mistake if he says that the principle of Benevolence is a moral principle only for other persons (or 'Others ought to promote others' interest') but is not a moral

principle for himself (i.e. 'He ought not to promote others' interest'). Obviously, 'others' interest' which constitutes a reason for him for prescribing that the principle of Benevolence is a moral principle for other persons of the society or the community (at least for those who are relevantly similar to him), also at the same time constitutes a reason for him to approve that the principle of Benevolence is a moral principle for him. This follows from our acceptance of the principle of Benevolence as a moral principle. But when X sincerely accepts that the principle of Benevolence is not only a moral principle for other persons of the society or the community, but is also a moral principle for himself he is satisfying the demand of the universalizability of moral principles. He quite consistently applied the principle of Benevolence in practice in one's own and in others' cases. Hence, others' interest also can be the content of moral principles.

X's acting on the principle of Benevolence is practically quite possible. The principle of Benevolence does not logically imply 'One ought to promote others' interest at the cost of one's own interest' or 'One ought to promote others' interest only, but never one's own interest'. Of course, this is also true that the principle of Benevolence does not imply 'One ought to promote one's interest'. It

implies only this much that one ought to promote others' interest. But at least this is true that the principle of Benevolence does not contradict 'One ought to promote others' interest by promoting one's own interest'. When X promotes others' interest by promoting his own interest he may be acting on the principle of Benevolence. In such cases he does not violate the principle. To hold a contrary view would be to misunderstand the nature of the principle of Benevolence itself. Further, to act with reference to others' interest and thus, to attempt to achieve one's end, is not necessarily to act at the cost of or to the disadvantage of one's own interest. Others' interest need not be in conflict with one's own interest. Hence, X's acting on the principle of Benevolence is quite possible.

The above discussion makes this point clear that the principle of Self-interest and the principle of Benevolence are mutually quite consistent on the ground that one does not negate the other. The principle of Self-interest only asserts that one ought to promote one's interest. It does not necessarily assert 'One ought to promote one's interest at the cost of others' interest', nor it asserts 'One ought not to promote others' interest'. Likewise, the principle of Benevolence only asserts that 'One ought to promote others' interest'. It does not necessarily assert 'One ought to

promote others' interest at the cost of one's interest', nor it asserts 'One ought not to promote one's interest'. Hence, it is quite possible for X to act on both the principles at the same time without committing breach of any principle. When X promotes his interest by promoting others' interest or promotes others' interest by promoting his own interest, he does not only act on the principle of Self-interest or the principle of Benevolence, but he acts on both the principles at the same time.

Just as self-interest and others' interest can be the content of moral principles, similarly all persons' interest (which is nothing but the combination of both self-interest and others' interest) also can be the content of moral principles. For example, X can quite consistently accept that the principle of Social harmony is a genuine moral principle not only for himself but also for other persons of the society or the community on the ground that it promotes everyone's interest. Of course, he would be committing a fallacy if he says that the principle of Social harmony is a moral principle for other persons of the society or the community (at least for those who are relevantly similar to him), but is not a moral principle for him. It may not be doubted that 'all persons' interest' which constitutes a reason for him for prescribing that the principle of Social

harmony is a moral principle for other persons of the society or the community (at least for those who are relevantly similar to him), also at the same time constitutes a reason for him to approve that the principle of Social harmony is a moral principle for himself. This follows from the use of the principle of Social harmony itself. But when X sincerely accepts that the principle of Social harmony is a moral principle not only for other persons of the society or the community, but is also a moral principle for him, then it is not a species of non-sequitur reasoning. He only consistently applies the principle of Social harmony in practice in one's own case and in that of other persons of the society or the community. Hence, 'all persons' interest' also can be the content of moral principles.

But this point should be taken into consideration that all the above forms of content are mutually quite consistent. Neither of them negates the other. The (i) and (ii) forms of content are mutually consistent as we saw in the above paragraph. The (iii) form of content is consistent with (i) and (ii) because it is nothing but the combination of (i) and (ii) forms of content.

Although all the above forms of content can be the content of moral principles but among them, the content of form (iii) is relatively more comprehensive and widely



acceptable. It necessarily involves the good of all persons of the society or the community of which the (i) and the (ii) forms of content are parts. On the other hand, the (i) and the (ii) forms of content taken individually, do not necessarily involve the good of all persons of the society or the community. The (i) form of content includes only self-regarding content but does not include the other-regarding content. Likewise, the (ii) form of the content includes only other-regarding content, but it does not include self-regarding content. Hence, acting on principle having the (iii) form of content is more intelligible and desirable from both individual and social points of view. The reason being that such a sort of principle brings harmony and co-operation among individuals to achieve their needs, goals, well-beings, welfare, advantages, interest, good, happiness etc..

Since the content of moral principle may be found in either of the forms (i), (ii) and (iii) and since there is no specific content which can be said to be always found attached with moral principles, it would be a mistake to think that there is one and only one moral principle from which other moral principles are derivable. There are many moral principles which enjoin the performance of a particular kind of actions upon someone, who sincerely accepts them in a particular kind of circumstances. This does not only follow from the variation

of contents but it also follows from the variation of human nature and men's abilities, characteristics and circumstances.

Moreover, whatever be the content of moral principles, in any case whenever X determines and, authorizes certain kind of moral principles and imposes them upon himself for doing certain kind of actions in certain kind of circumstances, he is thereby committed to accept that he accepts or adopts moral principles for good purposes and with good intentions. The use of moral principle always presupposes the presence of good purpose and good intention whenever it is applied. This follows from the very use of moral principle itself. Without 'latter' the use of the former cannot be justified. If X says that he does not determine, authorize and impose P upon himself for good purposes and with good intentions but, instead, he determines, authorizes and imposes P upon himself for bad purposes and with bad intentions, then thereby it would imply that the principle P which he accepts as a moral principle for him is not a moral principle at all. Denial of good purpose and good intention negates the acceptance of P as a moral principle. If X makes a contrary claim, that is, if he says that he sincerely determines, authorizes and imposes P as a moral principle upon himself to govern his conduct accordingly in the relevant circumstances but he does not determine, authorize and impose P upon himself for good

purpose and with good intention then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'. Refusal to admit the presence of good purpose and good intention, being contrary to what the use of the moral principle implies, makes it impossible for him to accept P as a moral principle. Hence, X's acceptance of P as a genuine moral principle in one's own case necessarily commits him to accept that he has chosen P for good purposes and with good intentions.

X's acceptance of P as a moral principle does not only commit him to accept that P involves good purpose and good intention when he accepts P in one's own case but P also commits him to accept that P involves good purpose and good intention when he prescribes P as a moral principle to others. The reason being the same that the use of the concept of moral principle always presupposes the presence of good purpose and good intention. This also follows from the use of the moral principle. If X says that he does not prescribe P to other persons of the society for good purposes and with good intentions but, instead, he prescribes P to them for bad purposes and with bad intentions then thereby it would imply that the principle P which he prescribes to them is not a moral principle at all. Denial of good purpose and good intention negates the prescription of P as a moral principle.

If X makes a contrary claim, that is, if he says that he sincerely prescribes P as a moral principle to other persons of the society or the community, but P does not involve good purpose and good intention in it, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'. Denial of good purpose and good intention, being contrary to what is implied by moral principle or even by the concept of morality as such, makes it impossible to prescribe P as a moral principle to other persons. Hence, X's prescription of P as a genuine moral principle to other persons of the society necessarily commits him to accept that he prescribes P for good purposes and with good intentions.

From the above analysis we may, thus, conclude that the 'content feature' is an essential feature of moral principle which any principle to be a moral principle must possess. But this is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition of moral principle. This does not alone make a principle a moral principle. Non-moral principles also do have this characteristic. For example, the principle 'We ought always to observe the traffic rules' promotes human welfare, good or advantage. But this is a legal, not a moral principle. Hence, morality implies content but content does not imply morality. To hold that moral principles alone have content is a misunderstanding of the nature of all other principles.

## CHAPTER VII

### Over-ridingness

In the previous chapter we had an occasion to see that it is the nature of moral principles that they promote human well-beings, welfare, interests, good, satisfaction or happiness. This constitutes reasons for someone for governing his conduct accordingly in the relevant circumstances and also to prescribe certain relevant actions to other persons of the society. But we have also seen in preceding chapter that it is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition of moral principles, because it alone does not make a principle, a moral principle. Besides content the other features like universalizability, prescriptivity etc. are also required. We could also not say that the content feature is a distinguishing characteristic of moral principles which brings difference between moral principles and non-moral principles. Non-moral principles also do have this sort of characteristic such as social, legal or religious principles. Although sanction and autonomy clearly distinguish moral principles from most of the non moral principles, still let us find out some other feature to understand the nature of moral principles more clearly as distinguished from other kinds of principles.

Suppose, X sincerely accepts that P is a genuine moral principle for him. What more does this imply besides what has been explained in preceding chapter? Does it not imply that P is an overriding principle? Certainly it does. When X sincerely accepts that P is a genuine moral principle for him then thereby it implies that P overrides (or prevails over) any other conflicting non-moral principles within the range of morality. This follows from the use of moral principle itself. Because within moral reasoning, it is always some moral premiss which would validate the inference of a moral conclusion. To put this point in other words, it is almost platitudinous to say that as long as we agree to remain within moral frame of reference, some moral principle would always ultimately determine whether an action is morally justifiable. In the context of morality, it is a truism to say that some moral principle forms the ultimate basis of one's action. If in a given situation which is nevertheless a moral situation, certain principle is to be superceded by any other principle, it can only be another moral principle which would supercede. Hence, in our present discussion, when we talk of overridingness of moral principle, we only mean that, morally speaking, in case of a conflict between a moral principle and other non-moral principles, the former does always override the latter. If X says that the principle P which he accepts as a moral

principle for him does not override any other conflicting non-moral principles but, instead, is overridden by them when an action is performed from moral point of view, then thereby it would imply that the principle P, which he accepts as a moral principle, is not a genuine moral principle at all. Refusal to admit overridingness negates the acceptance of P as a moral principle. How can without 'overridingness' the use of moral principle be brought into effect? Acting from moral point of view obviously presupposes acting on some moral principle. If X makes a contrary claim, that is, if he says that he sincerely accepts that P is a genuine moral principle for him, but P does not override the conflicting non-moral principles within the range of morality, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term moral principle'. Denial of the overridingness, being contrary to what is implied by the use of moral principle, makes the acceptance of P as a moral principle for him logically impossible. It implies that there is an implicative relation between moral principle and its overridingness, because the concept of moral principle always involves the concept of overridingness in it whenever it is applied. Hence X's acceptance of P as a genuine moral principle necessarily commits him to accept that P is an overriding principle in its nature.

X's acceptance of P as a moral principle, not only commits him to accept that P overrides the conflicting non-moral principle within the frame of morality, but P also commits him to accept that P over-rides the conflicting non-moral principle within the frame of morality when he prescribes P as a moral principle to other persons of the society or the community. This brings us to hold that there is some sort of relation between over-ridingness and prescriptivity implicit in the nature of moral principles. To hold a principle as over-riding is to prescribe it either to oneself or to others or to both in preference to some alternative principle/principles. But the converse is not always true. The prescriptivity of a moral principle does not determine its over-ridingness. If X says that P does not over-ride the conflicting non-moral principle if the action in question is performed from moral point of view, then thereby it would imply that P which he prescribes as a moral principle to other persons of the society, is not a moral principle at all. Denial of the overridingness negates the prescription of P as a moral principle to other persons of the society. This also follows from the use of moral principle itself. If X makes a contrary claim, that is, if he says that he sincerely prescribes P as a moral principle to other persons of the society, but P does not override the conflicting non-



moral principle if action is performed from moral point of view, then thereby it would imply that he makes an inconsistent statement and misuses the term 'moral principle'.

When X sincerely accepts that P is a moral principle then thereby it implies that P always over-rides only other conflicting non-moral principles when action is performed from moral point of view. But thereby it does not imply that P always over-rides other conflicting moral principles. In the latter case it makes no sense to say that moral principles are always over-riding in nature because one moral principle may or may not over-ride other conflicting moral principles in different sets of circumstances. For example moral principle P may over-ride moral principle  $P_1$  in the circumstances of kind C and moral principle  $P_1$  may over-ride moral principle P in the circumstances of kind  $C_1$ . This is logically and practically quite possible. Which one will over-ride the other solely depends upon the conflicting circumstance. In any case, X's acting on a principle would be moral as long as he acts in accordance with some moral principle. Thus in the case where conflict is found between moral principle and non-moral principle, moral principle always over-rides non-moral principle if action is performed from moral point of view. If, on the contrary, a non-moral principle is followed as an over-riding principle, then the action which is performed does

not remain moral because, it is performed in accordance with non-moral principle. Thus, if an action is performed from moral point of view, the over-riding principle does not remain non-moral principle and it becomes moral principle, because an action cannot be performed from moral point of view unless it is performed in accordance with a moral principle. This is always true. Hence there are two sorts of situation where the conflict in relation to a moral principle is possible:

(1) Within morality itself, that is, between one moral principle and another moral principle. (2) Between a moral principle and a non-moral principle. In the first case it makes no sense to say that moral principles are over-riding principles because one moral principle which over-rides another moral principle in one set of circumstances may be over-ridden by the same principle in another set of circumstances. In the latter case it is logically correct to say that moral principles are necessarily over-riding principles as has been explained above. Therefore, when we say that moral principles are always over-riding principles we make this statement in case of latter not in the former.

The over-ridden moral principle, however, does not lose its moral feature and obligatoriness. Its moral feature and obligatoriness still remain intact. In case of inability of carrying both moral principles,  $P$  and  $P_1$  at the same time

into practice, X chooses one moral principle in place of the other which he thinks is more compelling or weightier. But his choosing of one moral principle in place of the other moral principle, in such circumstances, does not logically imply that the principle which is not chosen, loses its moral feature and obligatoriness and becomes non-moral. It only implies that the principle which is chosen is an over-riding principle and the principle which is not chosen is not an over-riding principle under the given circumstance. Hence, it would be a mistake to say that the over-ridden moral principle loses its moral feature and obligatoriness and becomes a non-moral principle.

This point should be taken into consideration that 'over-ridingness' is relative. And being a relative term it has meaningful use only if there is a conflict. If there is no conflict, it makes no sense to say that one principle over-rides the other principle. This follows from the very meaning of the term 'over-riding' itself. Hence, X can say that principle P overrides principle  $P_1$  or principle  $P_1$  over-rides principle P meaningfully only if there is a conflict between P and  $P_1$ . If there is no conflict between P and  $P_1$ , it does not make any sense for X to say that P over-rides  $P_1$  or  $P_1$  over-rides P.

There is no logical connection between over-ridingness of a moral principle and its particular kind of content, although it is true that in most cases they go together. Sometimes we accept self-regarding content as the content of over-riding principle and sometimes we may accept other-regarding content as the content of over-riding moral principle. It all depends upon the individual to which sort of content he assigns greater moral value. Moreover, in any case his acting on a particular moral principle will always indicate his acceptance of it as an over-riding principle.

The above analysis makes it clear that over-ridingness is an essential feature of moral principle which any principle to be a moral principle must satisfy. But this is only a necessary, though not a sufficient condition of moral principle because it alone does not make a principle a moral principle. Non-moral principles can also be said to be over-riding principles in the same way though in non-moral contexts. Suppose X is faced with a difficult choice between two non-moral principles;  $P_2$  and  $P_3$  in the circumstances  $C_2$  when he is not in the position to do both and he also cannot abandon both of them. Again suppose, X makes a decision in favour of  $P_2$  instead of  $P_3$ , that is, he accepts  $P_2$  in preference to  $P_3$  in the circumstance  $C_2$ . In such case  $P_2$  can legitimately be said to be an over-riding principle because it is followed

in preference to  $P_3$ . But this does not mean that  $P_2$  having the feature of over-ridingness, is a moral principle. Hence, it is logically correct to say that morality implies over-ridingness but it is logically incorrect to say that over-ridingness also implies morality.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Conclusion

We may now indicate a few general conclusions which we are in a position to draw with regard to the problem of our study:

I. It is the nature of moral principles that they are universal and person-neutral. The actions which they enjoin upon someone in a certain kind of circumstance, are also at the same time enjoined upon all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances. What constitutes a reason for someone to say that a certain kind of principle is a moral principle for him also at the same time constitutes a reason for him to accept that the same principle is a moral principle for all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances. This follows from the concept of moral principle itself. Moral principles are not applicable, in the way in which logical and natural principles are, to all persons in all circumstances regardless of their nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances. The universalizability of moral principles must incorporate, and hold good despite, these very factors. It can hardly be over emphasized that moral principles are principles of action or conduct and it is the nature of act that it must accord with agent's nature,

abilities, characteristics and circumstances. In violation of these conditions, a principle loses its moral feature. It implies that a given moral principle which enjoins the performance of a particular kind of action upon someone in a particular kind of circumstance, does not enjoin the performance of the same kind of actions upon all persons in all circumstances regardless of their nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances. In other words, what is a moral principle for one person may or may not be accepted as a moral principle by, or be relevantly applicable to, other persons of the society. Moral principles are flexible in certain contexts where morally relevant differences are found though not arbitrarily. There is no criterion to decide which differences are morally relevant and which are morally irrelevant outside the context. What is morally relevant in a particular case may or may not be morally relevant in other cases. Similarly, what is morally irrelevant in a particular case may or may not be morally irrelevant in other cases. This happens because contexts vary. But within a given context there is no problem in determining or telling which differences are morally relevant and which differences are morally irrelevant. We can tell this by viewing the facts in the light of certain moral principle. If a certain difference materially affects the applicability of a moral principle then

it is a morally relevant difference and if it does not, then it is not a morally relevant difference, in that context. This, however, does not create any additional or significant difficulty for the applicability of moral principles which remains quite intelligible and meaningful. As matter of fact, human beings agree in their nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances. If human beings assimilate in their nature, abilities, characteristics and circumstances then one person's moral principle can become the moral principle for other persons of the society or the community. Expressions like 'I', 'me', 'you', 'this', 'that' and so on, do not debar moral principle from being applicable to all relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar circumstances.

II. Moral principles are prescriptive. They enjoin upon the person who sincerely accepts them, an obligation to affect some change in the states of affairs in relevant circumstances. This follows from the use of moral principle. Moral principles are principles of action or conduct and a principle of action or conduct cannot be the principle of action or conduct, unless it enjoins upon those who accept it to do some particular kind of action in a particular kind of circumstances. Moral principles do not only enjoin upon the person to govern his conduct accordingly in relevant circumstances when he accepts them in one's own case but they



also enjoin upon him to govern his conduct accordingly in relevant circumstances when he prescribes them to other persons of the society or the community unless there are relevant differences between him and their cases. The person who accepts a moral principle is thereby obligated to govern his behaviour accordingly in relevant circumstances. If the concerned person refuses to do accordingly in the relevant circumstances, the prescriptivity of moral principle is rejected. The acceptance or the prescription of moral principle depends upon the presupposition of the facts of ability from both logical and practical points of view. If the prescriber does not presuppose the facts of ability, there would be no prescription for him or the other person to whom prescription is directed. Because without presupposition of ability, moral principle cannot come into operation. The prescriptivity or action guiding-force is derived from the facts of doing accordingly in relevant circumstances. The acceptance or the prescription of moral principle does not logically depend upon the facts of success or failure. If it were accepted, then it would imply that whenever a person unsuccessfully tried to follow a prescription, there would be no prescription for him as he in fact did not successfully follow or accept the prescription. Failure or unsuccessful attempt to obey the prescription would thus negate the existence of moral

principle. But this is certainly not how we shape or wish to shape our notion of moral principles. In case of failure or non-success we still meaningfully accept to act on moral principle. Of course, this is absolutely true that we cannot be said to have ability, unless on most occasions, when we set ourselves to do the act we succeed in doing. In this sense one can say that success is criterion of ability but even then the meaning of 'can' of ability would be different from the meaning of 'can' of success or failure. In actual relevant circumstances, if the concerned person fails to carry the prescription of moral principle, the acceptability or the prescription of principle is not thereby rejected or negated. But such a case has to be explained with some justifying reason or reasons to make the applicability of moral principle consistent and intelligible. This is quite possible that the concerned person may fail in giving some justifying reason or reasons to make his assertion consistent and meaningful. But such case would not constitute any counter example. Inability to give reason is something different from refusing to do accordingly in relevant circumstances. In the former case the existence or the prescription of moral principle is not negated, while in the latter case the existence or the prescription of moral principle is negated. But this is philosophically an uninteresting situation. We have only to

assume that there are veridical reports of genuine practical difficulties. What is at best possible is to see whether such difficulties do in fact arise in practical situation, however rare they may be.

III. Moral principles are sanctioned principles. The source or the authority from which the sanction attached to moral principles proceeds is the individual's own conscience. Conscience is nothing but the notion or the sense of right and wrong which the individual derives from the process of reasoning, environment, subjective attitudes, preferences and experiences. This notion is developed since the childhood, not in a day or two. In the process of development sometimes it happens that what his conscience sanctions at time  $t_1$ , the something his conscience may not sanction at time  $t_2$ . This takes place when the concerned person does not take all possible considerations into account at the time of the formulation of the principle or leaves some relevant factors due to lack of knowledge, or some significant change might have occurred between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ . Such cases do not constitute any counter example. Because in such a case what is accepted as a moral principle is always sanctioned by his conscience. The individual's conscience does not only sanction moral principles but it also binds or puts pressure upon him to govern his conduct accordingly in relevant circumstances. The

force of sanction attached to moral principles generates the feeling in the individual that he is under an obligation to obey the principles. Moral principles are self-imposed principles. The sanction attached to them is internal not external. Moral principles do not exclude the individual's subjective attitudes i.e. desires, wants and preferences, because the source from which the sanction proceeds is his own conscience, and conscience is partly derived from his subjective attitudes and preferences. When the individual infringes upon moral principles or acts contrary to them, he undergoes various kinds of psychologically painful experiences. He feels guilt, remorse, shame, regret and uneasiness. But when he obeys the principles, he feels satisfaction and happiness. These positive and negative psychological features attached to moral principle compel or bind the individual to obey the principle. Positive and negative features vary in degree because of the variation of the force attached to moral principles and individual susceptibilities. Some moral principles are strongly sanctioned and some of them are sanctioned with relatively lesser rigour. Because of this, when they are obeyed or disobeyed in the relevant circumstances, they arouse more or less positive and negative psychological feelings for which we cannot give any statistical account.

IV. Moral principles are independent of any particular system of non-moral principles of the society or the community which may be prevalent during any given period of time and which may be determined or authorized by some external authority, i.e. imposed either by the government or the community. Moral principles, being independent of any particular system of non-moral principles of the society or the community, are neither justifiable with reference to them alone, nor they are derivable from them. They are not justifiable with reference to them because the principles of society or community are not themselves necessarily moral ones. If they are not themselves moral ones then they cannot be the justifying principles for moral ones. The obvious reason being that for justification of moral principles it is necessary that the principle with reference to which moral principles are justified must be a moral one. If a principle is not itself moral, it cannot be the justifying principle for moral principles. Similarly moral principles are not derivable from the principles of society or community for the same reason that the principles of society or community are not themselves moral ones. If they are not themselves moral, then moral principles cannot be derived from them. For the derivability of moral principles, it is necessary that the principle from which moral principles are derived must be moral one. If the

basic principle is itself non-moral then the derivability of moral principles would logically become impossible. Indeed, it is true that sometimes we accept and prescribe the principles of society or community as morally justifiable principles. But from such cases it does not follow that moral principles are derived from the principles of society or community. In such cases we do not derive moral principles from the principles of society or community, but rather what we do is that we critically examine the principles of society or community from moral point of view and when we find them morally justifiable, that is, in accordance with some moral principle, then we accept and prescribe them to other persons of the society or the community as morally justifiable principles. Acting on moral principles necessarily presupposes the autonomy of the individual. But the individual who accepts moral principles would be called an autonomous individual only if he himself determines or authors the moral principles and imposes them upon himself to govern his conduct accordingly in the relevant circumstances without external enforcement of any kind. If his acting on the principle is not autonomous, then it would be said that he does not act morally at all. For the same reason we talk of moral principles as autonomous in the sense that the reasons and considerations which we offer or accept in justification of a moral principle are, all of them moral.

V. Moral principles have some content in themselves, that is, they promote or further well-being, welfare, satisfaction, interest, good and happiness of human beings. But there is no specific content which is said to be always found attached with moral principles. Their content may be found either in the form of (i) self-regarding considerations or (ii) other-regarding considerations or (iii) universal considerations (which is nothing but the combination of (i) and (ii) forms of content). But in any case one can accept and authorize a principle as a genuine moral principle with reference to either of them without committing any fallacy. The reason is that these various forms of content are non-formal and contingent. And being non-formal and contingent either of them can intelligibly be the content of moral principles. These (i), (ii) and (iii) forms of content are mutually quite consistent because neither of them negates the other.\* But among them the last form of content is relatively more comprehensive and justifiable because it necessarily includes the content of all human beings of the society or the community, while the (i) and (ii) forms of content do not necessarily include the content of all human beings of the society or the

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\* There may, however, be incompatibility between (i) and (ii), between (i) and (iii), and between (ii) and (iii) if (i) is understood to mean 'one's own interest only' and (ii) is understood to mean 'others' interest only'.

community. Therefore acting on the principle having the form (iii) of content is more desirable from both individual and social points of view. Such a principle brings greater harmony and co-operation among individuals. Since the content of moral principles is found in either of the forms (i), (ii) and (iii), there is no specific content which can be said to be always found attached with moral principles. Therefore, it is a mistake to think that there is one and only one sort of moral principle, from which all other moral principles are derivable. Different forms of content constitute different kinds of reason and different kinds of reason constitute different kinds of moral principles. So, there are so many moral principles which enjoin the performance of a particular kind of actions upon someone who accepts them in a particular kind of circumstances. This does not only follow from the variation of contents, but it also follows from the variation of human nature and men's abilities, characteristics and circumstances. Moreover, whatever be the content of moral principles they are in any case determined, and imposed for good purposes and with good intentions. This follows from the applications of moral principle itself.

VI. Moral principles always override any other conflicting non-moral principle within the range of morality. Because within the range of morality someone's acting from the moral



point of view always presupposes his acting in accordance with a moral principle. If a non-moral principle is followed as an overriding principle then the action which is performed in accordance with it, does not remain a moral one, because it is performed in accordance with a non-moral principle and if action is performed from moral point of view, then the overriding principle does not remain non-moral principle. An action cannot be performed from moral point of view unless it is performed in accordance with some moral principle. This follows from our understanding of the term 'moral' itself. But within the frame of morality, it is logically incorrect to say that all moral principles are overriding in nature. A moral principle may or may not override the other conflicting moral principle in different set of circumstances. This is logically and practically quite possible. Between two conflicting moral principles, which principle will override the other, solely depends upon the conflicting circumstance. Outside the conflicting circumstances, it is not possible to tell which moral principle will override the other. But the overridden moral principle does not lose its moral character and obligatoriness. In such cases what happens is that because of inability of carrying both principles into practice at the same time, one principle is chosen in place of the other. But someone's choosing one principle in place of the

other in the conflicting situation where it is not possible for him to act on both the principles at the same time, does not imply that the principle which is not chosen loses its moral character and obligatoriness and becomes non-moral. It only implies that the principle which is chosen is an overriding principle and the principle which is not chosen is not an overriding principle, in that context. Moreover, there is no logical connection between overridingness and its particular kind of content, although it is true that in most cases they go together. Sometimes self-regarding content is accepted as the content of the overriding principle, and sometimes other-regarding content is accepted as the content of the overriding principle. It all depends upon the individual to which forms of content he assigns greater moral value.

VII. These various characteristics distinguish moral principles from non-moral principles. The features of prescriptivity and sanction distinguish moral principles from natural principles. Moral principles are imposed by human beings upon themselves. They are prescriptive. They give direction to do something in certain kind of circumstances. They are not applicable to all persons in all circumstances regardless of their nature, abilities, characteristics, choices, preferences and circumstances. Natural principles on the other hand, are not imposed by human beings upon themselves. They

are descriptive. They do not tell us what we ought to do or what we ought not to do, in the given circumstances. They are applicable to all persons in all circumstances regardless of their nature, abilities, characteristics, choices, preferences, and circumstances. Moral principles differ from logical and mathematical principles in the sense that the latter are concerned with validity and rules about propositions, inferences, numbers etc., while the former are not. Further, moral principles are not applicable to all persons in the same way in all circumstances regardless of their nature, abilities, characteristics, choices, preferences and circumstances while in the latter case these are irrelevant features. Logical and mathematical principles are applicable to all persons in the same way in all circumstances. Sanction and autonomy distinguish moral principles from social, legal and religious principles. Moral principles are autonomously determined, authorized (approved) and imposed by the individual himself. The sanction attached to them is internal and not external. Social, legal and religious principles are determined, authorized and imposed upon the individuals of the society or the community by the external authority and are usually accompanied by penalties for violation. The sanction attached to them is external and not internal.

VIII. Moral principles differ from moral laws and moral rules because they are more universal, general, pervasive and fundamental than moral laws and moral rules, and serve as their grounds or sources. Moral laws and moral rules are established and justified with reference to moral principles. The same moral principle can establish different rules in different circumstances, and hence for different societies or communities. The ultimate or the basic moral principle cannot be justified because there is no higher principle than such a moral principles with reference to which we can justify them. If at all such principles are justifiable, they are justifiable only with reference to their constituents or in the light of consistency and systematic ordering which such a principle imparts to the body of other moral principles which are or can be derived from such a principle.

Thus, we find that all the above stated features together go to determine whether a principle in question is a moral principle or not. Non-moral principles do possess some of these features but not all. But we are also conscious of the non-final character of our list of the features of moral principles. It is quite possible that we have not been able to identify some other uses or applications of moral principles which may convincingly indicate that there are still some more feature or features which belong to moral principles with as much justification as the features suggested by us do.

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